This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

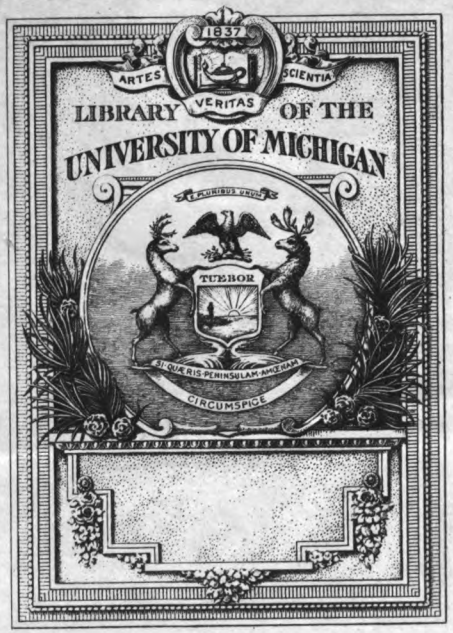
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

A 398372

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

828
J178ap.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CAPTAINS ALL

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CAPTAINS ALL

BY

W. W. JACOBS

McKINLAY, STONE & MACKENZIE
NEW YORK

Digitized by Google

COPYRIGHT, 1905, BY
WILLIAM W. JACOBS

COPYRIGHT, 1905, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

Published, November, 1905

Digitized by Google

Librarian
Freedman
8-27-24
10667

CONTENTS

	PAGE
CAPTAINS ALL	7
THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE	35
THE NEST EGG	67
THE CONSTABLE'S MOVE	93
BOB'S REDEMPTION	121
OVER THE SIDE	149
FOUR PIGEONS	167
THE TEMPTATION OF SAMUEL BURGE	191
THE MADNESS OF MR. LISTER	219
THE WHITE CAT	243

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Captains All

EVERY sailorman grumbles about the sea, said the night-watchman, thoughtfully. It's human nature to grumble, and I s'pose they keep on grumbling and sticking to it because there ain't much else they can do. There's not many shore-going berths that a sailorman is fit for, and those that they are —such as a night-watchman's, for instance— wants such a good character that there's few as are to equal it.

Sometimes they get things to do ashore. I knew one man that took up butchering, and 'e did very well at it till the police took *him* up. Another man I knew gave up the sea to marry a washerwoman, and they hadn't been married six months afore she died, and back he 'ad to go to sea agin, pore chap.

A man who used to grumble awful about

Digitized by Google

the sea was old Sam Small—a man I've spoke of to you before. To hear 'im go on about the sea, arter he 'ad spent four or five months' money in a fortnight, was 'artbreaking. He used to ask us wot was going to happen to 'im in his old age, and when we pointed out that he wouldn't be likely to 'ave any old age if he wasn't more careful of 'imself he used to fly into a temper and call us everything 'e could lay his tongue to.

One time when 'e was ashore with Peter Russet and Ginger Dick he seemed to 'ave got it on the brain. He started being careful of 'is money instead o' spending it, and three mornings running he bought a newspaper and read the advertisements, to see whether there was any comfortable berth for a strong, good-'arted man wot didn't like work.

He actually went arter one situation, and, if it hadn't ha' been for seventy-nine other men, he said he believed he'd ha' had a good chance of getting it. As it was, all 'e got was a black eye for shoving another man, and for a day or two he was so down-'arted

Digitized by Google

that 'e was no company at all for the other two.

For three or four days 'e went out by 'imself, and then, all of a sudden, Ginger Dick and Peter began to notice a great change in him. He seemed to 'ave got quite cheerful and 'appy. He answered 'em back pleasant when they spoke to 'im, and one night he lay in 'is bed whistling comic songs until Ginger and Peter Russet 'ad to get out o' bed to him. When he bought a new necktie and a smart cap and washed 'imself twice in one day they fust began to ask each other wot was up, and then they asked him.

"Up?" ses Sam; "nothing."

"He's in love," ses Peter Russet.

"You're a liar," ses Sam, without turning round.

"He'll 'ave it bad at 'is age," ses Ginger.

Sam didn't say nothing, but he kept fidgeting about as though 'e'd got something on his mind. Fust he looked out o' the winder, then he 'ummed a tune, and at last, looking at 'em very fierce, he took a tooth-brush wrapped in

Digitized by Google

paper out of 'is pocket and began to clean 'is teeth.

"He *is* in love," ses Ginger, as soon as he could speak.

"Or else 'e's gorn mad," ses Peter, watching 'im. "Which is it, Sam?"

Sam made believe that he couldn't answer 'im because o' the tooth-brush, and arter he'd finished he 'ad such a raging toothache that 'e sat in a corner holding 'is face and looking the pictur' o' misery. They couldn't get a word out of him till they asked 'im to go out with them, and then he said 'e was going to bed. Twenty minutes arterwards, when Ginger Dick stepped back for 'is pipe, he found he 'ad gorn.

He tried the same game next night, but the other two wouldn't 'ave it, and they stayed in so long that at last 'e lost 'is temper, and, arter wondering wot Ginger's father and mother could ha' been a-thinking about, and saying that he believed Peter Russet 'ad been changed at birth for a sea-sick monkey, he put on 'is cap and went out. Both of 'em follered 'im

Digitized by Google

sharp, but when he led 'em to a mission-hall, and actually went inside, they left 'im and went off on their own.

They talked it over that night between themselves, and next evening they went out fust and hid themselves round the corner. Ten minutes arterwards old Sam came out, walking as though 'e was going to catch a train; and smiling to think 'ow he 'ad shaken them off. At the corner of Commercial Road he stopped and bought 'imself a button-hole for 'is coat, and Ginger was so surprised that 'e pinched Peter Russet to make sure that he wasn't dreaming.

Old Sam walked straight on whistling, and every now and then looking down at 'is button-hole, until by-and-by he turned down a street on the right and went into a little shop. Ginger Dick and Peter waited for 'im at the corner, but he was inside for so long that at last they got tired o' waiting and crept up and peeped through the winder.

It was a little tobacconist's shop, with newspapers and penny toys and such-like;

Digitized by Google

but, as far as Ginger could see through two rows o' pipes and the *Police News,* it was empty. They stood there with their noses pressed against the glass for some time, wondering wot had 'appened to Sam, but by-and-by a little boy went in and then they began to 'ave an idea wot Sam's little game was.

As the shop-bell went the door of a little parlour at the back of the shop opened, and a stout and uncommon good-looking woman of about forty came out. Her 'ead pushed the *Police News* out o' the way and her 'and came groping into the winder arter a toy. Ginger 'ad a good look at 'er out o' the corner of one eye, while he pretended to be looking at a tobacco-jar with the other. As the little boy came out 'im and Peter Russet went in.

"I want a pipe, please," he ses, smiling at 'er; "a clay pipe—one o' your best."

The woman handed 'im down a box to choose from, and just then Peter, wot 'ad been staring in at the arf-open door at a boot wot wanted lacing up, gave a big start and ses, "Why! Halloa!"

Digitized by Google

"Wot's the matter?" ses the woman, looking at 'im.

"I'd know that foot anywhere," ses Peter, still staring at it; and the words was hardly out of 'is mouth afore the foot 'ad moved itself away and tucked itself under its chair. "Why, that's my dear old friend Sam Small, ain't it?"

"Do you know the captin?" ses the woman, smiling at 'im.

"Cap—— ?" ses Peter. "*Cap*——? Oh, yes; why, he's the biggest friend I've got."

"'Ow strange!" ses the woman.

"We've been wanting to see 'im for some time," ses Ginger. "He was kind enough to lend me arf a crown the other day, and I've been wanting to pay 'im."

"Captin Small," ses the woman, pushing open the door, "here's some old friends o' yours."

Old Sam turned 'is face round and looked at 'em, and if looks could ha' killed, as the saying is, they'd ha' been dead men there and then.

Digitized by Google

"Oh, yes," he ses, in a choking voice; "'ow are you?"

"Pretty well, thank you, *captin*," ses Ginger, grinning at 'im; "and 'ow's yourself arter all this long time?"

He held out 'is hand and Sam shook it, and then shook 'ands with Peter Russet, who was grinning so 'ard that he couldn't speak.

"These are two old friends o' mine, Mrs. Finch," ses old Sam, giving 'em a warning look; "Captin Dick and Captin Russet, two o' the oldest and best friends a man ever 'ad."

"Captin Dick 'as got arf a crown for you," ses Peter Russet, still grinning.

"There now," ses Ginger, looking vexed, "if I ain't been and forgot it; I've on'y got arf a sovereign."

"I can give you change, sir," ses Mrs. Finch. "P'r'aps you'd like to sit down for five minutes?"

Ginger thanked 'er, and 'im and Peter Russet took a chair apiece in front o' the fire and began asking old Sam about 'is 'ealth,

Digitized by Google

and wot he'd been doing since they saw 'im last.

"Fancy your reckernizing his foot," ses Mrs. Finch, coming in with the change.

"I'd know it anywhere," ses Peter, who was watching Ginger pretending to give Sam Small the 'arf-dollar, and Sam pretending in a most lifelike manner to take it.

Ginger Dick looked round the room. It was a comfortable little place, with pictures on the walls and antimacassars on all the chairs, and a row of pink vases on the mantelpiece. Then 'e looked at Mrs. Finch, and thought wot a nice-looking woman she was.

"This is nicer than being aboard ship with a crew o' nasty, troublesome sailormen to look arter, Captin Small," he ses.

"It's wonderful the way he manages 'em," ses Peter Russet to Mrs. Finch. "Like a lion he is."

"A roaring lion," ses Ginger, looking at Sam. "He don't know wot fear is."

Sam began to smile, and Mrs. Finch looked at 'im so pleased that Peter Russet, who 'ad

Digitized by Google

been looking at 'er and the room, and thinking much the same way as Ginger, began to think that they was on the wrong tack.

"Afore 'e got stout and old," he ses, shaking his 'ead, "there wasn't a smarter skipper afloat."

"We all 'ave our day," ses Ginger, shaking his 'ead too.

"I dessay he's good for another year or two afloat, yet," ses Peter Russet, considering.

"With care," ses Ginger.

Old Sam was going to say something, but 'e stopped himself just in time. "They will 'ave their joke," he ses, turning to Mrs. Finch and trying to smile. "I feel as young as ever I did."

Mrs. Finch said that anybody with arf an eye could see that, and then she looked at a kettle that was singing on the 'ob.

"I s'pose you gentlemen wouldn't care for a cup o' cocoa?" she ses, turning to them.

Ginger Dick and Peter both said that they liked it better than anything else, and, arter she 'ad got out the cups and saucers and a

Digitized by Google

tin o' cocoa, Ginger held the kettle and poured the water in the cups while she stirred them, and old Sam sat looking on 'elpless.

"It does seem funny to see you drinking cocoa, captin," ses Ginger, as old Sam took his cup.

"Ho!" ses Sam, firing up; "and why, if I might make so bold as to ask?"

"'Cos I've generally seen you drinking something out of a bottle," ses Ginger.

"Now, look 'ere," ses Sam, starting up and spilling some of the hot cocoa over 'is lap.

"A ginger-beer bottle," ses Peter Russet, making faces at Ginger to keep quiet.

"Yes, o' course, that's wot I meant," ses Ginger.

Old Sam wiped the cocoa off 'is knees without saying a word, but his weskit kept going up and down till Peter Russet felt quite sorry for 'im.

"There's nothing like it," he ses to Mrs. Finch. "It was by sticking to ginger-beer and milk and such-like that Captain Small 'ad command of a ship afore 'e was twenty-five."

Digitized by Google

"Lor'!" ses Mrs. Finch.

She smiled at old Sam till Peter got uneasy agin, and began to think p'r'aps 'e'd been praising 'im too much.

"Of course, I'm speaking of long ago now," he ses.

"Years and years afore you was born, ma'am," ses Ginger.

Old Sam was going to say something, but Mrs. Finch looked so pleased that 'e thought better of it. Some o' the cocoa 'e was drinking went the wrong way, and then Ginger patted 'im on the back and told 'im to be careful not to bring on 'is brownchitis agin. Wot with temper and being afraid to speak for fear they should let Mrs. Finch know that 'e wasn't a captin, he could 'ardly bear 'imself, but he very near broke out when Peter Russet advised 'im to 'ave his weskit lined with red flannel. They all stayed on till closing time, and by the time they left they 'ad made theirselves so pleasant that Mrs. Finch said she'd be pleased to see them any time they liked to look in.

Sam Small waited till they 'ad turned the

Digitized by Google

corner, and then he broke out so alarming that they could 'ardly do anything with 'im. Twice policemen spoke to 'im and advised 'im to go home afore they altered their minds; and he 'ad to hold 'imself in and keep quiet while Ginger and Peter Russet took 'is arms and said they were seeing him 'ome.

He started the row agin when they got indoors, and sat up in 'is bed smacking 'is lips over the things he'd like to 'ave done to them if he could. And then, arter saying 'ow he'd like to see Ginger boiled alive like a lobster, he said he knew that 'e was a noble-'arted feller who wouldn't try and cut an old pal out, and that it was a case of love at first sight on top of a tram-car.

"She's too young for you," ses Ginger; "and too good-looking besides."

"It's the nice little bisness he's fallen in love with, Ginger," ses Peter Russet. "I'll toss you who 'as it."

Ginger, who was siting on the foot o' Sam's bed, said "no" at fust, but arter a time he pulled out arf a dollar and spun it in the air.

Digitized by Google

That was the last 'e see of it, although he 'ad Sam out o' bed and all the clothes stripped off of it twice. He spent over arf an hour on his 'ands and knees looking for it, and Sam said when he was tired of playing bears p'r'aps he'd go to bed and get to sleep like a Christian.

They 'ad it all over agin next morning, and at last, as nobody would agree to keep quiet and let the others 'ave a fair chance, they made up their minds to let the best man win. Ginger Dick bought a necktie that took all the colour out o' Sam's, and Peter Russet went in for a collar so big that 'e was lost in it.

They all strolled into the widow's shop separate that night. Ginger Dick 'ad smashed his pipe and wanted another; Peter Russet wanted some tobacco; and old Sam Small walked in smiling, with a little silver brooch for 'er, that he said 'e had picked up.

It was a very nice brooch, and Mrs. Finch was so pleased with it that Ginger and Peter sat there as mad as they could be because they 'adn't thought of the same thing.

Digitized by Google

"Captain Small is very lucky at finding things," ses Ginger, at last.

"He's got the name for it," ses Peter Russet.

"It's a handy 'abit," ses Ginger; "it saves spending money. Who did you give that gold bracelet to you picked up the other night, captin?" he ses, turning to Sam.

"Gold bracelet?" ses Sam. "I didn't pick up no gold bracelet. Wot are you talking about?"

"All right, captin; no offence," ses Ginger, holding up his 'and. "I dreamt I saw one on your mantelpiece, I s'pose. P'r'aps I oughtn't to ha' said anything about it."

Old Sam looked as though he'd like to eat 'im, especially as he noticed Mrs. Finch listening and pretending not to. "Oh! that one," he ses, arter a bit o' hard thinking. "Oh! I found out who it belonged to. You wouldn't believe 'ow pleased they was at getting it back agin."

Ginger Dick coughed and began to think as 'ow old Sam was sharper than he 'ad given 'im credit for, but afore he could think of any-

Digitized by Google

thing else to say Mrs. Finch looked at old Sam and began to talk about 'is ship, and to say 'ow much she should like to see over it.

"I wish I could take you," ses Sam, looking at the other two out o' the corner of his eye, "but my ship's over at Dunkirk, in France. I've just run over to London for a week or two to look round."

"And mine's there too," ses Peter Russet, speaking a'most afore old Sam 'ad finished; "side by side they lay in the harbour."

"Oh, dear," ses Mrs. Finch, folding her 'ands and shaking her 'ead. "I *should* like to go over a ship one arternoon. I'd quite made up my mind to it, knowing three captins."

She smiled and looked at Ginger; and Sam and Peter looked at 'im too, wondering whether he was going to berth his ship at Dunkirk alongside o' theirs.

"Ah, I wish I 'ad met you a fortnight ago," ses Ginger, very sad. "I gave up my ship, the *Highflyer,* then, and I'm waiting for one my owners are 'aving built for me at Newcastle. They said the *Highflyer* wasn't big

Digitized by Google

enough for me. She was a nice little ship, though. I believe I've got 'er picture somewhere about me!"

He felt in 'is pocket and pulled out a little, crumpled-up photograph of a ship he'd been fireman aboard of some years afore, and showed it to 'er.

"That's me standing on the bridge," he ses, pointing out a little dot with the stem of 'is pipe.

"It's your figger," ses Mrs. Finch, straining her eyes. "I should know it anywhere."

"You've got wonderful eyes, ma'am," ses old Sam, choking with 'is pipe.

"Anybody can see that," ses Ginger. "They're the largest and the bluest I've ever seen."

Mrs. Finch told 'im not to talk nonsense, but both Sam and Peter Russet could see 'ow pleased she was.

"Truth is truth," ses Ginger. "I'm a plain man, and I speak my mind."

"Blue is my fav'rit' colour," ses old Sam, in a tender voice. "True blue."

Digitized by Google

Peter Russet began to feel out of it. "I thought brown was," he ses.

"Ho!" ses Sam, turning on 'im; "and why?"

"I 'ad my reasons," ses Peter, nodding, and shutting 'is mouth very firm.

"I thought brown was 'is fav'rit' colour too," ses Ginger. "I don't know why. It's no use asking me; because if you did I couldn't tell you."

"Brown's a very nice colour," ses Mrs. Finch, wondering wot was the matter with old Sam.

"Blue," ses Ginger; "big blue eyes—they're the ones for me. Other people may 'ave their blacks and their browns," he ses, looking at Sam and Peter Russet, "but give me blue."

They went on like that all the evening, and every time the shop-bell went and the widow 'ad to go out to serve a customer they said in w'ispers wot they thought of each other; and once when she came back rather sudden Ginger 'ad to explain to 'er that 'e was showing Peter Russet a scratch on his knuckle.

Digitized by Google

Ginger Dick was the fust there next night, and took 'er a little chiney teapot he 'ad picked up dirt cheap because it was cracked right acrost the middle; but, as he explained that he 'ad dropped it in hurrying to see 'er, she was just as pleased. She stuck it up on the mantelpiece, and the things she said about Ginger's kindness and generosity made Peter Russet spend good money that he wanted for 'imself on a painted flower-pot next evening.

With three men all courting 'er at the same time Mrs. Finch had 'er hands full, but she took to it wonderful considering. She was so nice and kind to 'em all that even arter a week's 'ard work none of 'em was really certain which she liked best.

They took to going in at odd times o' the day for tobacco and such-like. They used to go alone then, but they all met and did the polite to each other there of an evening, and then quarrelled all the way 'ome.

Then all of a sudden, without any warning, Ginger Dick and Peter Russet left off going there. The fust evening Sam sat expecting

Digitized by Google

them every minute, and was so surprised that he couldn't take any advantage of it; but on the second, beginning by squeezing Mrs. Finch's 'and at ha'-past seven, he 'ad got best part of his arm round 'er waist by a quarter to ten. He didn't do more that night because she told him to be'ave 'imself, and threatened to scream if he didn't leave off.

He was arf-way home afore 'e thought of the reason for Ginger Dick and Peter Russet giving up, and then he went along smiling to 'imself to such an extent that people thought 'e was mad. He went off to sleep with the smile still on 'is lips, and when Peter and Ginger came in soon arter closing time and 'e woke up and asked them where they'd been, 'e was still smiling.

"I didn't 'ave the pleasure o' seeing you at Mrs. Finch's to-night," he ses.

"No," ses Ginger, very short. "We got tired of it."

"So un'ealthy sitting in that stuffy little room every evening," ses Peter.

Old Sam put his 'ead under the bedclothes

Digitized by Google

and laughed till the bed shook; and every now and then he'd put his 'ead out and look at Peter and Ginger and laugh agin till he choked.

"I see 'ow it is," he ses, sitting up and wiping his eyes on the sheet. "Well, we can't all win."

"Wot d'ye mean?" ses Ginger, very disagreeable.

"She wouldn't 'ave you," ses Sam, "that's wot I mean. And I don't wonder at it. I wouldn't 'ave you if I was a gal."

"You're dreaming," ses Peter Russet, sneering at 'im.

"That flower-pot o' yours'll come in handy," ses Sam, thinking 'ow he 'ad put 'is arm round the widow's waist; "and I thank you kindly for the teapot, Ginger."

"You don't mean to say as you've asked 'er to marry you?" ses Ginger, looking at Peter Russet.

"Not quite; but I'm going to," ses Sam, "and I'll bet you even arf-crowns she ses 'yes.'"

Ginger wouldn't take 'im, and no more

Digitized by Google

would Peter, not even when he raised it to five shillings; and the vain way old Sam lay there boasting and talking about 'is way with the gals made 'em both feel ill.

"I wouldn't 'ave her if she asked me on 'er bended knees," ses Ginger, holding up his 'ead.

"Nor me," ses Peter. "You're welcome to 'er, Sam. When I think of the evenings I've wasted over a fat old woman I feel——"

"That'll do," ses old Sam, very sharp; "that ain't the way to speak of a lady, even if she 'as said 'no.'"

"All right, Sam," ses Ginger. "You go in and win if you think you're so precious clever."

Old Sam said that that was wot 'e was going to do, and he spent so much time next morning making 'imself look pretty that the other two could 'ardly be civil to him.

He went off a'most direckly arter breakfast, and they didn't see 'im agin till twelve o'clock that night. He 'ad brought a bottle o' whisky in with 'im, and he was so 'appy that they see plain wot had 'appened.

"She said 'yes' at two o'clock in the arter-

Digitized by Google

noon," ses old Sam, smiling, arter they had 'ad a glass apiece. "I'd nearly done the trick at one o'clock, and then the shop-bell went, and I 'ad to begin all over agin. Still, it wasn't unpleasant."

"Do you mean to tell us you've asked 'er to marry you?" ses Ginger, 'olding out 'is glass to be filled agin.

"I do," ses Sam; "but I 'ope there's no ill-feeling. You never 'ad a chance, neither of you; she told me so."

Ginger Dick and Peter Russet stared at each other.

"She said she 'ad been in love with me all along," ses Sam, filling their glasses agin to cheer 'em up. "We went out arter tea and bought the engagement-ring, and then she got somebody to mind the shop and we went to the Pagoda music-'all."

"I 'ope you didn't pay much for the ring, Sam," ses Ginger, who always got very kind-'arted arter two or three glasses o' whisky. "If I'd known you was going to be in such a hurry I might ha' told you before."

Digitized by Google

"We ought to ha' done," ses Peter, shaking his 'ead.

"Told me?" ses Sam, staring at 'em. "Told me wot?"

"Why me and Peter gave it up," ses Ginger; "but, o' course, p'r'aps you don't mind."

"Mind wot?" ses Sam.

"It's wonderful 'ow quiet she kept it," ses Peter.

Old Sam stared at 'em agin, and then he asked 'em to speak in plain English wot they'd got to say, and not to go taking away the character of a woman wot wasn't there to speak up for herself.

"It's nothing agin 'er character," ses Ginger.

"It's a credit to her, looked at properly," ses Peter Russet.

"And Sam'll 'ave the pleasure of bringing of 'em up," ses Ginger.

"*Bringing of 'em up?*" ses Sam, in a trembling voice and turning pale; "bringing who up?"

"Why, 'er children," ses Ginger. "Didn't she tell you? She's got nine of 'em."

Digitized by Google

Sam pretended not to believe 'em at fust, and said they was jealous; but next day he crept down to the greengrocer's shop in the same street, where Ginger had 'appened to buy some oranges one day, and found that it was only too true. Nine children, the eldest of 'em only fifteen, was staying with diff'rent relations owing to scarlet-fever next door.

Old Sam crept back 'ome like a man in a dream, with a bag of oranges he didn't want, and, arter making a present of the engagement-ring to Ginger—if 'e could get it—he took the fust train to Tilbury and signed on for a v'y'ge to China.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Boatswain's Mate

MR. GEORGE BENN, retired boatswain, sighed noisily, and with a despondent gesture, turned to the door and stood with the handle in his hand; Mrs. Waters, sitting behind the tiny bar in a tall Windsor-chair, eyed him with some heat.

"My feelings'll never change," said the boatswain.

"Nor mine either," said the landlady, sharply. "It's a strange thing, Mr. Benn, but you always ask me to marry you after the third mug."

"It's only to get my courage up," pleaded the boatswain. "Next time I'll do it afore I 'ave a drop; that'll prove to you I'm in earnest."

He stepped outside and closed the door before the landlady could make a selection from the many retorts that crowded to her lips.

Digitized by Google

After the cool bar, with its smell of damp sawdust, the road seemed hot and dusty; but the boatswain, a prey to gloom natural to a man whose hand has been refused five times in a fortnight, walked on unheeding. His steps lagged, but his brain was active.

He walked for two miles deep in thought, and then coming to a shady bank took a seat upon an inviting piece of turf and lit his pipe. The heat and the drowsy hum of bees made him nod; his pipe hung from the corner of his mouth, and his eyes closed.

He opened them at the sound of approaching footsteps, and, feeling in his pocket for matches, gazed lazily at the intruder. He saw a tall man carrying a small bundle over his shoulder, and in the erect carriage, the keen eyes, and bronzed face had little difficulty in detecting the old soldier.

The stranger stopped as he reached the seated boatswain and eyed him pleasantly.

"Got a pipe o' baccy, mate?" he inquired.

The boatswain handed him the small metal box in which he kept that luxury.

Digitized by Google

"Lobster, ain't you?" he said, affably.

The tall man nodded. "Was," he replied. "Now I'm my own commander-in-chief."

"Padding it?" suggested the boatswain, taking the box from him and refilling his pipe.

The other nodded, and with the air of one disposed to conversation dropped his bundle in the ditch and took a seat beside him. "I've got plenty of time," he remarked.

Mr. Benn nodded, and for a while smoked on in silence. A dim idea which had been in his mind for some time began to clarify. He stole a glance at his companion—a man of about thirty-eight, clear eyes, with humorous wrinkles at the corners, a heavy moustache, and a cheerful expression more than tinged with recklessness.

"Ain't over and above fond o' work?" suggested the boatswain, when he had finished his inspection.

"I love it," said the other, blowing a cloud of smoke in the air, "but we can't have all we want in this world; it wouldn't be good for us."

Digitized by Google

The boatswain thought of Mrs. Waters, and sighed. Then he rattled his pocket.

"Would arf a quid be any good to you?" he inquired.

"Look here," began the soldier; "just because I asked you for a pipe o' baccy——"

"No offence," said the other, quickly. "I mean if you earned it?"

The soldier nodded and took his pipe from his mouth. "Gardening and windows?" he hazarded, with a shrug of his shoulders.

The boatswain shook his head.

"Scrubbing, p'r'aps?" said the soldier, with a sigh of resignation. "Last house I scrubbed out I did it so thoroughly they accused me of pouching the soap. Hang 'em!"

"And you didn't?" queried the boatswain, eyeing him keenly.

The soldier rose and, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, gazed at him darkly. "I can't give it back to you," he said, slowly, "because I've smoked some of it, and I can't pay you for it because I've only got twopence, and that I want for myself. So long, matey, and next

Digitized by Google

time a poor wretch asks you for a pipe, be civil."

"I never see such a man for taking offence in all my born days," expostulated the boatswain. "I 'ad my reasons for that remark, mate. Good reasons they was."

The soldier grunted and, stooping, picked up his bundle.

"I spoke of arf a sovereign just now," continued the boatswain, impressively, "and when I tell you that I offer it to you to do a bit o' burgling, you'll see 'ow necessary it is for me to be certain of your honesty."

"*Burgling?*" gasped the astonished soldier. "*Honesty?* 'Struth; are you drunk or am I?"

"Meaning," said the boatswain, waving the imputation away with his hand, "for you to pretend to be a burglar."

"We're *both* drunk, that's what it is," said the other, resignedly.

The boatswain fidgeted. "If you don't agree, mum's the word and no 'arm done," he said, holding out his hand.

"Mum's the word," said the soldier, taking

Digitized by Google

it. "My name's Ned Travers, and, barring cells for a spree now and again, there's nothing against it. Mind that."

"Might 'appen to anybody," said Mr. Benn, soothingly. "You fill your pipe and don't go chucking good tobacco away agin."

Mr. Travers took the offered box and, with economy born of adversity, stooped and filled up first with the plug he had thrown away. Then he resumed his seat and, leaning back luxuriously, bade the other "fire away."

"I ain't got it all ship-shape and proper yet," said Mr. Benn, slowly, "but it's in my mind's eye. It's been there off and on like for some time."

He lit his pipe again and gazed fixedly at the opposite hedge. "Two miles from here, where I live," he said, after several vigorous puffs, "there's a little public-'ouse called the *Beehive,* kept by a lady wot I've got my eye on."

The soldier sat up.

"She won't 'ave me," said the boatswain, with an air of mild surprise.

The soldier leaned back again.

"She's a lone widder," continued Mr. Benn,

Digitized by Google

shaking his head, "and the *Beehive* is in a lonely place. It's right through the village, and the nearest house is arf a mile off."

"Silly place for a pub," commented Mr. Travers.

"I've been telling her 'ow unsafe it is," said the boatswain. "I've been telling her that she wants a man to protect her, and she only laughs at me. She don't believe it; d'ye see? Likewise I'm a small man—small, but stiff. She likes tall men."

"Most women do," said Mr. Travers, sitting upright and instinctively twisting his moustache. "When I was in the ranks——"

"My idea is," continued the boatswain, slightly raising his voice, "to kill two birds with one stone—prove to her that she does want being protected, and that I'm the man to protect her. D'ye take my meaning, mate?"

The soldier reached out a hand and felt the other's biceps. "Like a lump o' wood," he said, approvingly.

"My opinion is," said the boatswain, with a faint smirk, "that she loves me without knowing it."

Digitized by Google

"They often do," said Mr. Travers, with a grave shake of his head.

"Consequently I don't want 'er to be disappointed," said the other.

"It does you credit," remarked Mr. Travers.

"I've got a good head," said Mr. Benn, "else I shouldn't 'ave got my rating as boatswain as soon as I did; and I've been turning it over in my mind, over and over agin, till my brain-pan fair aches with it. Now, if you do what I want you to to-night and it comes off all right, damme I'll make it a quid."

"Go on, Vanderbilt," said Mr. Travers; "I'm listening."

The boatswain gazed at him fixedly. "You meet me 'ere in this spot at eleven o'clock to-night," he said, solemnly; "and I'll take you to her 'ouse and put you through a little winder I know of. You goes upstairs and alarms her, and she screams for help. I'm watching the house, faithful-like, and hear 'er scream. I dashes in at the winder, knocks you down, and rescues her. D'ye see?"

"I hear," corrected Mr. Travers, coldly.

Digitized by Google

"She clings to me," continued the boatswain, with a rapt expression of face, "in her gratitood, and, proud of my strength and pluck, she marries me."

"An' I get a five years' honeymoon," said the soldier.

The boatswain shook his head and patted the other's shoulder. "In the excitement of the moment you spring up and escape," he said, with a kindly smile. "I've thought it all out. You can run much faster than I can; anyways, you *will*. The nearest 'ouse is arf a mile off, as I said, and her servant is staying till tomorrow at 'er mother's, ten miles away."

Mr. Travers rose to his feet and stretched himself. "Time I was toddling," he said, with a yawn. "Thanks for amusing me, mate."

"You won't do it?" said the boatswain, eyeing him with much concern.

"I'm hanged if I do," said the soldier, emphatically. "Accidents will happen, and then where should I be?"

"If they did," said the boatswain, "I'd own up and clear you."

Digitized by Google

"You might," said Mr. Travers, "and then again you mightn't. So long, mate."

"I—I'll make it two quid," said the boatswain, trembling with eagerness. "I've took a fancy to you; you're just the man for the job."

The soldier, adjusting his bundle, glanced at him over his shoulder. "Thankee," he said, with mock gratitude.

"Look 'ere," said the boatswain, springing up and catching him by the sleeve; "I'll give it to you in writing. Come, you ain't faint-hearted? Why, a bluejacket 'ud do it for the fun o' the thing. If I give it to you in writing, and there should be an accident, it's worse for me than it is for you, ain't it?"

Mr. Travers hesitated and, pushing his cap back, scratched his head.

"I gives you the two quid afore you go into the house," continued the boatswain, hastily following up the impression he had made. "I'd give 'em to you now if I'd got 'em with me. That's *my* confidence in *you;* I likes the look of you. Soldier or sailor, when there is a

Digitized by Google

man's work to be done, give 'em to me afore anybody."

The soldier seated himself again and let his bundle fall to the ground. "Go on," he said, slowly. "Write it out fair and square and sign it, and I'm your man."

The boatswain clapped him on the shoulder and produced a bundle of papers from his pocket. "There's letters there with my name and address on 'em," he said. "It's all fair, square, and above-board. When you've cast your eyes over them I'll give you the writing."

Mr. Travers took them and, re-lighting his pipe, smoked in silence, with various side glances at his companion as that enthusiast sucked his pencil and sat twisting in the agonies of composition. The document finished—after several failures had been retrieved and burnt by the careful Mr. Travers—the boatswain heaved a sigh of relief, and handing it over to him, leaned back with a complacent air while he read it.

"Seems all right," said the soldier, folding

Digitized by Google

it up and putting it in his waistcoat-pocket. "I'll be here at eleven to-night."

"Eleven it is," said the boatswain, briskly, "and, between pals—here's arf a dollar to go on with."

He patted him on the shoulder again, and with a caution to keep out of sight as much as possible till night walked slowly home. His step was light, but he carried a face in which care and exultation were strangely mingled.

By ten o'clock that night care was in the ascendant, and by eleven, when he discerned the red glow of Mr. Travers's pipe set as a beacon against a dark background of hedge, the boatswain was ready to curse his inventive powers. Mr. Travers greeted him cheerily and, honestly attributing the fact to good food and a couple of pints of beer he had had since the boatswain left him, said that he was ready for anything.

Mr. Benn grunted and led the way in silence. There was no moon, but the night was clear, and Mr. Travers, after one or two light-hearted attempts at conversation, aban-

Digitized by Google

doned the effort and fell to whistling softly instead.

Except for one lighted window the village slept in darkness, but the boatswain, who had been walking with the stealth of a Red Indian on the war-path, breathed more freely after they had left it behind. A renewal of his antics a little farther on apprised Mr. Travers that they were approaching their destination, and a minute or two later they came to a small inn standing just off the road. "All shut up and Mrs. Waters abed, bless her," whispered the boatswain, after walking carefully round the house. "How do you feel?"

"I'm all right," said Mr. Travers. "I feel as if I'd been burgling all my life. How do you feel?"

"Narvous," said Mr. Benn, pausing under a small window at the rear of the house. "This is the one."

Mr. Travers stepped back a few paces and gazed up at the house. All was still. For a few moments he stood listening and then rejoined the boatswain.

Digitized by Google

"Good-bye, mate," he said, hoisting himself on to the sill. "Death or victory."

The boatswain whispered and thrust a couple of sovereigns into his hand. "Take your time; there's no hurry," he muttered. "I want to pull myself together. Frighten 'er enough, but not too much. When she screams I'll come in."

Mr. Travers slipped inside and then thrust his head out of the window. "Won't she think it funny you should be so handy?" he inquired.

"No; it's my faithful 'art," said the boatswain, "keeping watch over her every night, that's the ticket. She won't know no better."

Mr. Travers grinned, and removing his boots passed them out to the other. "We don't want her to hear me till I'm upstairs," he whispered. "Put 'em outside, handy for me to pick up."

The boatswain obeyed, and Mr. Travers—who was by no means a good hand at darning socks—shivered as he trod lightly over a stone floor. Then, following the instructions of Mr.

Digitized by Google

Benn, he made his way to the stairs and mounted noiselessly.

But for a slight stumble half-way up his progress was very creditable for an amateur. He paused and listened and, all being silent, made his way to the landing and stopped outside a door. Despite himself his heart was beating faster than usual.

He pushed the door open slowly and started as it creaked. Nothing happening he pushed again, and standing just inside saw, by a small ewer silhouetted against the casement, that he was in a bedroom. He listened for the sound of breathing, but in vain.

"Quiet sleeper," he reflected; "or perhaps it is an empty room. Now, I wonder whether——"

The sound of an opening door made him start violently, and he stood still, scarcely breathing, with his ears on the alert. A light shone on the landing, and peeping round the door he saw a woman coming along the corridor —a younger and better-looking woman than he had expected to see. In one hand she held

Digitized by Google

aloft a candle, in the other she bore a double-barrelled gun. Mr. Travers withdrew into the room and, as the light came nearer, slipped into a big cupboard by the side of the fireplace and, standing bolt upright, waited. The light came into the room.

"Must have been my fancy," said a pleasant voice.

"Bless her," smiled Mr. Travers.

His trained ear recognized the sound of cocking triggers. The next moment a heavy body bumped against the door of the cupboard and the key turned in the lock.

"Got you!" said the voice, triumphantly. "Keep still; if you try and break out I shall shoot you."

"All right," said Mr. Travers, hastily; "I won't move."

"Better not," said the voice. "Mind, I've got a gun pointing straight at you."

"Point it downwards, there's a good girl," said Mr. Travers, earnestly; "and take your finger off the trigger. If anything happened to me you'd never forgive yourself."

Digitized by Google

"It's all right so long as you don't move," said the voice; "and I'm not a girl," it added, sternly.

"Yes, you are," said the prisoner. "I saw you. I thought it was an angel at first. I saw your little bare feet and——"

A faint scream interrupted him.

"You'll catch cold," urged Mr. Travers.

"Don't you trouble about me," said the voice, tartly.

"I won't give any trouble," said Mr. Travers, who began to think it was time for the boatswain to appear on the scene. "Why don't you call for help? I'll go like a lamb."

"I don't want your advice," was the reply. "I know what to do. Now, don't you try and break out. I'm going to fire one barrel out of the window, but I've got the other one for you if you move."

"My dear *girl,*" protested the horrified Mr. Travers, "you'll alarm the neighbourhood."

"Just what I want to do," said the voice. "Keep still, mind."

Mr. Travers hesitated. The game was up,

Digitized by Google

and it was clear that in any case the stratagem of the ingenious Mr. Benn would have to be disclosed.

"Stop!" he said, earnestly. "Don't do anything rash. I'm not a burglar; I'm doing this for a friend of yours—Mr. Benn."

"*What?*" said an amazed voice.

"True as I stand here," asseverated Mr. Travers. "Here, here's my instructions. I'll put 'em under the door, and if you go to the back window you'll see him in the garden waiting."

He rustled the paper under the door, and it was at once snatched from his fingers. He regained an upright position and stood listening to the startled and indignant exclamations of his gaoler as she read the boatswain's permit:—

"*This is to give notice that I, George Benn, being of sound mind and body, have told Ned Travers to pretend to be a burglar at Mrs. Waters's. He ain't a burglar, and I shall be outside all the time. It's all above-board and ship-shape.*

"(*Signed*) *George Benn.*"

Digitized by Google

"Sound mind — above-board — ship-shape," repeated a dazed voice. "*Where is he?*"

"Out at the back," replied Mr. Travers. "If you go to the window you can see him. Now, do put something round your shoulders, there's a good girl."

There was no reply, but a board creaked. He waited for what seemed a long time, and then the board creaked again.

"Did you see him?" he inquired.

"I did," was the sharp reply. "You both ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You ought to be punished."

"There *is* a clothes-peg sticking into the back of my head," remarked Mr. Travers. "What are you going to do?"

There was no reply.

"What are you going to do?" repeated Mr. Travers, somewhat uneasily. "You look too nice to do anything hard; leastways, so far as I can judge through this crack."

There was a smothered exclamation, and then sounds of somebody moving hastily about the room and the swish of clothing hastily donned.

Digitized by Google

"You ought to have done it before," commented the thoughtful Mr. Travers. "It's enough to give you your death of cold."

"Mind your business," said the voice, sharply. "Now, if I let you out, will you promise to do exactly as I tell you?"

"Honour bright," said Mr. Travers, fervently.

"I'm going to give Mr. Benn a lesson he won't forget," proceeded the other, grimly. "I'm going to fire off this gun, and then run down and tell him I've killed you."

"*Eh?*" said the amazed Mr. Travers. "Oh, Lord!"

"*H'sh!* Stop that laughing," commanded the voice. "He'll hear you. Be *quiet!*"

The key turned in the lock, and Mr. Travers, stepping forth, clapped his hand over his mouth and endeavoured to obey. Mrs. Waters, stepping back with the gun ready, scrutinized him closely.

"Come on to the landing," said Mr. Travers, eagerly. "We don't want anybody else to hear. Fire into this."

Digitized by Google

He snatched a patchwork rug from the floor and stuck it up against the balusters.

"You stay here," said Mrs. Waters.

He nodded.

She pointed the gun at the hearth-rug, the walls shook with the explosion, and, with a shriek that set Mr. Travers's teeth on edge, she rushed downstairs and, drawing back the bolts of the back door, tottered outside and into the arms of the agitated boatswain.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried.

"What—what's the matter?" gasped the boatswain.

The widow struggled in his arms. "A burglar," she said, in a tense whisper. "But it's all right; I've killed him."

"Kill——" stuttered the other. "Kill—— *Killed him?*"

Mrs. Waters nodded and released herself, "First shot," she said, with a satisfied air.

The boatswain wrung his hands. "Good heavens!" he said, moving slowly towards the door. "Poor fellow!"

Digitized by Google

"Come back," said the widow, tugging at his coat.

"I was—was going to see—whether I could do anything for 'im," quavered the boatswain. "Poor fellow!"

"You stay where you are," commanded Mrs. Waters. "I don't want any witnesses. I don't want this house to have a bad name. I'm going to keep it quiet."

"Quiet?" said the shaking boatswain. "How?"

"First thing to do," said the widow, thoughtfully, "is to get rid of the body. I'll bury him in the garden, I think. There's a very good bit of ground behind those potatoes. You'll find the spade in the tool-house."

The horrified Mr. Benn stood stock-still regarding her.

"While you're digging the grave," continued Mrs. Waters, calmly, "I'll go in and clean up the mess."

The boatswain reeled and then fumbled with trembling fingers at his collar.

Like a man in a dream he stood watching as

Digitized by Google

she ran to the tool-house and returned with a spade and pick; like a man in a dream he followed her on to the garden.

"Be careful," she said, sharply; "you're treading down my potatoes."

The boatswain stopped dead and stared at her. Apparently unconscious of his gaze, she began to pace out the measurements and then, placing the tools in his hands, urged him to lose no time.

"I'll bring him down when you're gone," she said, looking towards the house.

The boatswain wiped his damp brow with the back of his hand. "How are you going to get it downstairs?" he breathed.

"Drag it," said Mrs. Waters, briefly.

"Suppose he isn't dead?" said the boatswain, with a gleam of hope.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mrs. Waters. "Do you think I don't know? Now, don't waste time talking; and mind you dig it deep. I'll put a few cabbages on top afterwards—I've got more than I want."

She re-entered the house and ran lightly

Digitized by Google

upstairs. The candle was still alight and the gun was leaning against the bed-post; but the visitor had disappeared. Conscious of an odd feeling of disappointment, she looked round the empty room.

"Come and look at him," entreated a voice, and she turned and beheld the amused countenance of her late prisoner at the door.

"I've been watching from the back window," he said, nodding. "You're a wonder; that's what you are. Come and look at him."

Mrs. Waters followed, and leaning out of the window watched with simple pleasure the efforts of the amateur sexton. Mr. Benn was digging like one possessed, only pausing at intervals to straighten his back and to cast a fearsome glance around him. The only thing that marred her pleasure was the behaviour of Mr. Travers, who was struggling for a place with all the fervour of a citizen at the Lord Mayor's show.

"Get back," she said, in a fierce whisper. "He'll see you."

Digitized by Google

Mr. Travers with obvious reluctance obeyed, just as the victim looked up.

"Is that you, Mrs. Waters?" inquired the boatswain, fearfully.

"Yes, of course it is," snapped the widow. "Who else should it be, do you think? Go on! What are you stopping for?"

Mr. Benn's breathing as he bent to his task again was distinctly audible. The head of Mr. Travers ranged itself once more alongside the widow's. For a long time they watched in silence.

"Won't you come down here, Mrs. Waters?" called the boatswain, looking up so suddenly that Mr. Travers's head bumped painfully against the side of the window. "It's a bit creepy, all alone."

"I'm all right," said Mrs. Waters.

"I keep fancying there's something dodging behind them currant bushes," pursued the unfortunate Mr. Benn, hoarsely. "How you can stay there alone I can't think. I thought I saw something looking over your shoulder just now. Fancy if it came creeping up behind and caught hold of you!"

Digitized by Google

The widow gave a sudden faint scream.

"If you do that again——" she said, turning fiercely on Mr. Travers.

"He put it into my head," said the culprit, humbly; "I should never have thought of such a thing by myself. I'm one of the quietest and best-behaved——"

"Make haste, Mr. Benn," said the widow, turning to the window again; "I've got a lot to do when you've finished."

The boatswain groaned and fell to digging again, and Mrs. Waters, after watching a little while longer, gave Mr. Travers some pointed instructions about the window and went down to the garden again.

"That will do, I think," she said, stepping into the hole and regarding it critically. "Now you'd better go straight off home, and, mind, not a word to a soul about this."

She put her hand on his shoulder, and noticing with pleasure that he shuddered at her touch led the way to the gate. The boatswain paused for a moment, as though about to speak, and then, apparently thinking better of

Digitized by Google

it, bade her good-bye in a hoarse voice and walked feebly up the road. Mrs. Waters stood watching until his steps died away in the distance, and then, returning to the garden, took up the spade and stood regarding with some dismay the mountainous result of his industry. Mr. Travers, who was standing just inside the back door, joined her.

"Let me," he said, gallantly.

The day was breaking as he finished his task. The clean, sweet air and the exercise had given him an appetite to which the smell of cooking bacon and hot coffee that proceeded from the house had set a sharper edge. He took his coat from a bush and put it on. Mrs. Waters appeared at the door.

"You had better come in and have some breakfast before you go," she said, brusquely; "there's no more sleep for me now."

Mr. Travers obeyed with alacrity, and after a satisfying wash in the scullery came into the big kitchen with his face shining and took a seat at the table. The cloth was neatly laid, and Mrs. Waters, fresh and cool, with a smile

Digitized by Google

upon her pleasant face, sat behind the tray. She looked at her guest curiously, Mr. Travers's spirits being somewhat higher than the state of his wardrobe appeared to justify.

"Why don't you get some settled work?" she inquired, with gentle severity, as he imparted snatches of his history between bites.

"Easier said than done," said Mr. Travers, serenely. "But don't you run away with the idea that I'm a beggar, because I'm not. I pay my way, such as it is. And, by-the-bye, I s'pose I haven't earned that two pounds Benn gave me?"

His face lengthened, and he felt uneasily in his pocket.

"I'll give them to him when I'm tired of the joke," said the widow, holding out her hand and watching him closely.

Mr. Travers passed the coins over to her. "Soft hand you've got," he said, musingly. "I don't wonder Benn was desperate. I dare say I should have done the same in his place."

Mrs. Waters bit her lip and looked out at the window; Mr. Travers resumed his breakfast.

Digitized by Google

"There's only one job that I'm really fit for, now that I'm too old for the Army," he said, confidentially, as, breakfast finished, he stood at the door ready to depart.

"Playing at burglars?" hazarded Mrs. Waters.

"Landlord of a little country public-house," said Mr. Travers, simply.

Mrs. Waters fell back and regarded him with open-eyed amazement.

"Good morning," she said, as soon as she could trust her voice.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Travers, reluctantly. "I should like to hear how old Benn takes this joke, though."

Mrs. Waters retreated into the house and stood regarding him. "If you're passing this way again and like to look in—I'll tell you," she said, after a long pause. "Good-bye."

"I'll look in in a week's time," said Mr. Travers.

He took the proffered hand and shook it warmly. "It would be the best joke of all," he said, turning away.

Digitized by Google

"What would?"

The soldier confronted her again.

"For old Benn to come round here one evening and find me landlord. Think it over."

Mrs. Waters met his gaze soberly. "I'll think it over when you have gone," she said, softly. "Now go."

Digitized by Google

THE NEST EGG

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Nest Egg

"ARTFULNESS," said the night-watchman, smoking placidly, "is a gift; but it don't pay always. I've met some artful ones in my time—plenty of 'em; but I can't truthfully say as 'ow any of them was the better for meeting me."

He rose slowly from the packing-case on which he had been sitting and, stamping down the point of a rusty nail with his heel, resumed his seat, remarking that he had endured it for some time under the impression that it was only a splinter.

"I've surprised more than one in my time," he continued, slowly. "When I met one of these 'ere artful ones I used fust of all to pretend to be more stupid than wot I really am."

He stopped and stared fixedly.

Digitized by Google

"More stupid than I looked," he said.

He stopped again.

"More stupid than wot they thought I looked," he said, speaking with marked deliberation. And I'd let 'em go on and on until I thought I had 'ad about enough, and then turn round on 'em. Nobody ever got the better o' me except my wife, and that was only before we was married. Two nights arterwards she found a fish-hook in my trouser-pocket, and arter that I could ha' left untold gold there—if I'd ha' had it. It 'spoilt wot some people call the honey-moon, but it paid in the long run.

One o' the worst things a man can do is to take up artfulness all of a sudden. I never knew it to answer yet, and I can tell you of a case that'll prove my words true.

It's some years ago now, and the chap it 'appened to was a young man, a shipmate o' mine, named Charlie Tagg. Very steady young chap he was, too steady for most of 'em. That's 'ow it was me and 'im got to be such pals.

Digitized by Google

The Nest Egg

He'd been saving up for years to get married, and all the advice we could give 'im didn't 'ave any effect. He saved up nearly every penny of 'is money and gave it to his gal to keep for 'im, and the time I'm speaking of she'd got seventy-two pounds of 'is and seventeen-and-six of 'er own to set up house-keeping with.

Then a thing happened that I've known to 'appen to sailormen afore. At Sydney 'e got silly on another gal, and started walking out with her, and afore he knew wot he was about he'd promised to marry 'er too.

Sydney and London being a long way from each other was in 'is favour, but the thing that troubled 'im was 'ow to get that seventy-two pounds out of Emma Cook, 'is London gal, so as he could marry the other with it. It worried 'im all the way home, and by the time we got into the London river 'is head was all in a maze with it. Emma Cook 'ad got it all saved up in the bank, to take a little shop with when they got spliced, and 'ow to get it he could not think.

Digitized by Google

He went straight off to Poplar, where she lived, as soon as the ship was berthed. He walked all the way so as to 'ave more time for thinking, but wot with bumping into two old gentlemen with bad tempers, and being nearly run over by a cabman with a white 'orse and red whiskers, he got to the house without 'aving thought of anything.

They was just finishing their tea as 'e got there, and they all seemed so pleased to see 'im that it made it worse than ever for 'im. Mrs. Cook, who 'ad pretty near finished, gave 'im her own cup to drink out of, and said that she 'ad dreamt of 'im the night afore last, and old Cook said that he 'ad got so good-looking 'e shouldn't 'ave known him.

"I should 'ave passed 'im in the street," he ses. "I never see such an alteration."

"They'll be a nice-looking couple," ses his wife, looking at a young chap, named George Smith, that 'ad been sitting next to Emma.

Charlie Tagg filled 'is mouth with bread and butter, and wondered 'ow he was to begin. He squeezed Emma's 'and just for the sake of

Digitized by Google

keeping up appearances, and all the time 'e was thinking of the other gal waiting for 'im thousands o' miles away.

"You've come 'ome just in the nick o' time," ses old Cook; "if you'd done it o' purpose you couldn't 'ave arranged it better."

"Somebody's birthday?" ses Charlie, trying to smile.

Old Cook shook his 'ead. "Though mine is next Wednesday," he ses, "and thank you for thinking of it. No; you're just in time for the biggest bargain in the chandlery line that anybody ever 'ad a chance of. If you 'adn't ha' come back we should have 'ad to ha' done it without you."

"Eighty pounds," ses Mrs. Cook, smiling at Charlie. "With the money Emma's got saved and your wages this trip you'll 'ave plenty. You must come round arter tea and 'ave a look at it."

"Little place not arf a mile from 'ere," ses old Cook. "Properly worked up, the way Emma'll do it, it'll be a little fortune. I wish I'd had a chance like it in my young time."

Digitized by Google

He sat shaking his 'ead to think wot he'd lost, and Charlie Tagg sat staring at 'im and wondering wot he was to do.

"My idea is for Charlie to go for a few more v'y'ges arter they're married while Emma works up the business," ses Mrs. Cook; "she'll be all right with young Bill and Sarah 'Ann to 'elp her and keep 'er company while he's away."

"We'll see as she ain't lonely," ses George Smith, turning to Charlie.

Charlie Tagg gave a bit of a cough and said it wanted considering. He said it was no good doing things in a 'urry and then repenting of 'em all the rest of your life. And 'e said he'd been given to understand that chandlery wasn't wot it 'ad been, and some of the cleverest people 'e knew thought that it would be worse before it was better. By the time he'd finished they was all looking at 'im as though they couldn't believe their ears.

"You just step round and 'ave a look at the place," ses old Cook; "if that don't make you alter your tune, call me a sinner."

Digitized by Google

Charlie Tagg felt as though 'e could ha' called 'im a lot o' worse things than that, but he took up 'is hat and Mrs. Cook and Emma got their bonnets on and they went round.

"I don't think much of it for eighty pounds," ses Charlie, beginning his artfulness as they came near a big shop, with plate-glass and a double front.

"Eh?" ses old Cook, staring at 'im. "Why, that ain't the place. Why, you wouldn't get that for eight 'undred."

"Well, I don't think much of it," ses Charlie; "if it's worse than that I can't look at it—I can't, indeed."

"You ain't been drinking, Charlie?" ses old Cook, in a puzzled voice.

"Certainly not," ses Charlie.

He was pleased to see 'ow anxious they all looked, and when they did come to the shop 'e set up a laugh that old Cook said chilled the marrer in 'is bones. He stood looking in a 'elpless sort o' way at his wife and Emma, and then at last he ses, "There it is; and a fair bargain at the price."

Digitized by Google

"I s'pose *you* ain't been drinking?" ses Charlie.

"Wot's the matter with it?" ses Mrs. Cook flaring up.

"Come inside and look at it," ses Emma, taking 'old of his arm.

"Not me," ses Charlie, hanging back. "Why, I wouldn't take it at a gift."

He stood there on the kerbstone, and all they could do 'e wouldn't budge. He said it was a bad road and a little shop, and 'ad got a look about it he didn't like. They walked back 'ome like a funeral procession, and Emma 'ad to keep saying "*H'sh!*" in w'ispers to 'er mother all the way.

"I don't know wot Charlie does want, I'm sure," ses Mrs. Cook, taking off 'er bonnet as soon as she got indoors and pitching it on the chair he was just going to set down on.

"It's so awk'ard," ses old Cook, rubbing his 'ead. "Fact is, Charlie, we pretty near gave 'em to understand as we'd buy it."

"It's as good as settled," ses Mrs. Cook, trembling all over with temper.

Digitized by Google

"They won't settle till they get the money," ses Charlie. "You may make your mind easy about that."

"Emma's drawn it all out of the bank ready," ses old Cook, eager like.

Charlie felt 'ot and cold all over. "I'd better take care of it," he ses, in a trembling voice. "You might be robbed."

"So might you be," ses Mrs. Cook. "Don't you worry; it's in a safe place."

"Sailormen are always being robbed," ses George Smith, who 'ad been helping young Bill with 'is sums while they 'ad gone to look at the shop. "There's more sailormen robbed than all the rest put together."

"They won't rob Charlie," ses Mrs. Cook, pressing 'er lips together. "I'll take care o' that."

Charlie tried to laugh, but 'e made such a queer noise that young Bill made a large blot on 'is exercise-book, and old Cook, wot was lighting his pipe, burnt 'is fingers through not looking wot 'e was doing.

"You see," ses Charlie, "if I was robbed,

Digitized by Google

which ain't at all likely, it 'ud only be me losing my own money; but if you was robbed of it you'd never forgive yourselves."

"I dessay I should get over it," ses Mrs. Cook, sniffing. "I'd 'ave a try, at all events."

Charlie started to laugh agin, and old Cook, who had struck another match, blew it out and waited till he'd finished.

"The whole truth is," ses Charlie, looking round, "I've got something better to do with the money. I've got a chance offered me that'll make me able to double it afore you know where you are."

"Not afore I know where I am," ses Mrs. Cook, with a laugh that was worse than Charlie's.

"The chance of a lifetime," ses Charlie, trying to keep 'is temper. "I can't tell you wot it is, because I've promised to keep it secret for a time. You'll be surprised when I do tell you."

"If I wait till then till I'm surprised," ses Mrs. Cook, "I shall 'ave to wait a long time.

Digitized by Google

My advice to you is to take that shop and ha' done with it."

Charlie sat there arguing all the evening, but it was no good, and the idea o' them people sitting there and refusing to let 'im have his own money pretty near sent 'im crazy. It was all 'e could do to kiss Emma good-night, and 'e couldn't have 'elped slamming the front door if he'd been paid for it. The only comfort he 'ad got left was the Sydney gal's photygraph, and he took that out and looked at it under nearly every lamp-post he passed.

He went round the next night and 'ad another try to get 'is money, but it was no use; and all the good he done was to make Mrs. Cook in such a temper that she 'ad to go to bed before he 'ad arf finished. It was no good talking to old Cook and Emma, because they daren't do anything without 'er, and it was no good calling things up the stairs to her because she didn't answer. Three nights running Mrs. Cook went off to bed afore eight o'clock, for fear she should say something to

Digitized by Google

'im as she'd be sorry for arterwards; and for three nights Charlie made 'imself so disagreeable that Emma told 'im plain the sooner 'e went back to sea agin the better she should like it. The only one who seemed to enjoy it was George Smith, and 'e used to bring bits out o' newspapers and read to 'em, showing 'ow silly people was done out of their money.

On the fourth night Charlie dropped it and made 'imself so amiable that Mrs. Cook stayed up and made 'im a Welsh rare-bit for 'is supper, and made 'im drink two glasses o' beer instead o' one, while old Cook sat and drank three glasses o' water just out of temper, and to show that 'e didn't mind. When she started on the chandler's shop agin Charlie said he'd think it over, and when 'e went away Mrs. Cook called 'im her sailor-boy and wished 'im pleasant dreams.

But Charlie Tagg 'ad got better things to do than to dream, and 'e sat up in bed arf the night thinking out a new plan he'd thought of to get that money. When 'e did fall asleep at last 'e dreamt of taking a little farm in

Digitized by Google

Australia and riding about on 'orseback with the Sydney gal watching his men at work.

In the morning he went and hunted up a shipmate of 'is, a young feller named Jack Bates. Jack was one o' these 'ere chaps, nobody's enemy but their own, as the saying is; a good-'arted, free-'anded chap as you could wish to see. Everybody liked 'im, and the ship's cat loved 'im. He'd ha' sold the shirt off 'is back to oblige a pal, and three times in one week he got 'is face scratched for trying to prevent 'usbands knocking their wives about.

Charlie Tagg went to 'im because he was the only man 'e could trust, and for over arf an hour he was telling Jack Bates all 'is troubles, and at last, as a great favour, he let 'im see the Sydney gal's photygraph, and told him that all that pore gal's future 'appiness depended upon 'im.

"I'll step round to-night and rob 'em of that seventy-two pounds," ses Jack; "it's your money, and you've a right to it."

Charlie shook his 'ead. "That wouldn't

Digitized by Google

do," he ses; "besides, I don't know where they keep it. No; I've got a better plan than that. Come round to the *Crooked Billet,* so as we can talk it over in peace and quiet."

He stood Jack three or four arf-pints afore 'e told 'im his plan, and Jack was so pleased with it that he wanted to start at once, but Charlie persuaded 'im to wait.

"And don't you spare me, mind, out o' friendship," ses Charlie, "because the blacker you paint me the better I shall like it."

"You trust me, mate," ses Jack Bates; "if I don't get that seventy-two pounds for you, you may call me a Dutchman. Why, it's fair robbery, I call it, sticking to your money like that."

They spent the rest o' the day together, and when evening came Charlie went off to the Cooks'. Emma 'ad arf expected they was going to a theayter that night, but Charlie said he wasn't feeling the thing, and he sat there so quiet and miserable they didn't know wot to make of 'im.

"'Ave you got any trouble on your mind,

Digitized by Google

Charlie," ses Mrs. Cook, "or is it the toothache?"

"It ain't the toothache," ses Charlie.

He sat there pulling a long face and staring at the floor, but all Mrs. Cook and Emma could do 'e wouldn't tell them wot was the matter with 'im. He said 'e didn't want to worry other people with 'is troubles; let everybody bear their own, that was 'is motto. Even when George Smith offered to go to the theayter with Emma instead of 'im he didn't fire up, and, if it 'adn't ha' been for Mrs. Cook, George wouldn't ha' been sorry that 'e spoke.

"Theayters ain't for me," ses Charlie, with a groan. "I'm more likely to go to gaol, so far as I can see, than a theayter."

Mrs. Cook and Emma both screamed and Sarah Ann did 'er first highstericks, and very well, too, considering that she 'ad only just turned fifteen.

"Gaol!" ses old Cook, as soon as they 'ad quieted Sarah Ann with a bowl o' cold water that young Bill 'ad the presence o' mind to go and fetch. "Gaol! What for?"

Digitized by Google

"You wouldn't believe if I was to tell you." ses Charlie, getting up to go, "and besides, I don't want any of you to think as 'ow I am worse than wot I am."

He shook his 'ead at them sorrowful-like, and afore they could stop 'im he 'ad gone. Old Cook shouted arter 'im, but it was no use, and the others was running into the scullery to fill the bowl agin for Emma.

Mrs. Cook went round to 'is lodgings next morning, but found that 'e was out. They began to fancy all sorts o' things then, but Charlie turned up agin that evening more miserable than ever.

"I went round to see you this morning," ses Mrs. Cook, "but you wasn't at 'ome."

"I never am, 'ardly," ses Charlie. "I can't be—it ain't safe."

"Why not?" ses Mrs. Cook, fidgeting.

"If I was to tell you, you'd lose your good opinion of me," ses Charlie.

"It wouldn't be much to lose," ses Mrs. Cook, firing up.

Charlie didn't answer 'er. When he did

Digitized by Google

speak he spoke to the old man, and he was so down-'arted that 'e gave 'im the chills a'most. He 'ardly took any notice of Emma, and, when Mrs. Cook spoke about the shop agin, said that chandlers' shops was for happy people, not for 'im.

By the time they sat down to supper they was nearly all as miserable as Charlie 'imself. From words he let drop they all seemed to 'ave the idea that the police was arter 'im, and Mrs. Cook was just asking 'im for wot she called the third and last time, but wot was more likely the hundred and third, wot he'd done, when there was a knock at the front door, so loud and so sudden that old Cook and young Bill both cut their mouths at the same time.

"Anybody 'ere o' the name of Emma Cook?" ses a man's voice, when young Bill opened the door.

"She's inside," ses the boy, and the next moment Jack Bates followed 'im into the room, and then fell back with a start as 'e saw Charlie Tagg.

Digitized by Google

"Ho, 'ere you are, are you?" he ses, looking at 'im very black.

"Wot's the matter?" ses Mrs. Cook, very sharp.

"I didn't expect to 'ave the pleasure o' seeing you 'ere, my lad," ses Jack, still staring at Charlie, and twisting 'is face up into awful scowls. "Which is Emma Cook?"

"Miss Cook is my name," ses Emma, very sharp. "Wot d'ye want?"

"Very good," ses Jack Bates, looking at Charlie agin; "then p'r'aps you'll do me the kindness of telling that lie o' yours agin afore this young lady."

"It's the truth," ses Charlie, looking down at 'is plate.

"If somebody don't tell me wot all this is about in two minutes, I shall do something desprit," ses Mrs. Cook, getting up.

"This 'ere—er—man," ses Jack Bates, pointing at Charlie, "owes me seventy-five pounds and won't pay. When I ask 'im for it he ses a party he's keeping company with, by the name of Emma Cook, 'as got it, and he can't get it."

Digitized by Google

"So she has," ses Charlie, without looking up.

"Wot does 'e owe you the money for?" ses Mrs. Cook.

"'Cos I lent it to 'im," ses Jack.

"Lent it? What for?" ses Mrs. Cook.

"'Cos I was a fool, I s'pose," ses Jack Bates; "a good-natured fool. Anyway, I'm sick and tired of asking for it, and if I don't get it to-night I'm going to see the police about it."

He sat down on a chair with 'is hat cocked over one eye, and they all sat staring at 'im as though they didn't know wot to say next.

"So this is wot you meant when you said you'd got the chance of a lifetime, is it?" ses Mrs. Cook to Charlie. "This is wot you wanted it for, is it? Wot did you borrow all that money for?"

"Spend," ses Charlie, in a sulky voice.

"Spend!" ses Mrs. Cook, with a scream; "wot in?"

"Drink and cards mostly," ses Jack Bates, remembering wot Charlie 'ad told 'im about blackening 'is character.

Digitized by Google

You might ha' heard a pin drop a'most, and Charlie sat there without saying a word.

"Charlie's been led away," ses Mrs. Cook, looking 'ard at Jack Bates. "I s'pose you lent 'im the money to win it back from 'im at cards, didn't you?"

"And gave 'im too much licker fust," ses old Cook. "I've 'eard of your kind. If Charlie takes my advice 'e won't pay you a farthing. I should let you do your worst if I was 'im; that's wot I should do. You've got a low face; a nasty, ugly, low face."

"One o' the worst I ever see," ses Mrs. Cook. "It looks as though it might ha' been cut out o' the *Police News*."

"'Owever could you ha' trusted a man with a face like that, Charlie?" ses old Cook. "Come away from 'im, Bill; I don't like such a chap in the room."

Jack Bates began to feel very awk'ard. They was all glaring at 'im as though they could eat 'im, and he wasn't used to such treatment. And, as a matter o' fact, he'd got a very good-'arted face.

Digitized by Google

"You go out o' that door," ses old Cook, pointing to it. "Go and do your worst. You won't get any money 'ere."

"Stop a minute," ses Emma, and afore they could stop 'er she ran upstairs. Mrs. Cook went arter 'er and 'igh words was heard up in the bedroom, but by-and-by Emma came down holding her head very 'igh and looking at Jack Bates as though he was dirt.

"How am I to know Charlie owes you this money?" she ses.

Jack Bates turned very red, and arter fumbling in 'is pockets took out about a dozen dirty bits o' paper, which Charlie 'ad given 'im for I O U's. Emma read 'em all, and then she threw a little parcel on the table.

"There's your money," she ses; "take it and go."

Mrs. Cook and 'er father began to call out, but it was no good.

"There's seventy-two pounds there," ses Emma, who was very pale; "and 'ere's a ring you can have to 'elp make up the rest." And she drew Charlie's ring off and throwed it on

Digitized by Google

the table. "I've done with 'im for good," she ses, with a look at 'er mother.

Jack Bates took up the money and the ring and stood there looking at 'er and trying to think wot to say. He'd always been uncommon partial to the sex, and it did seem 'ard to stand there and take all that on account of Charlie Tagg.

"I only wanted my own," he ses, at last, shuffling about the floor.

"Well, you've got it," ses Mrs. Cook, "and now you can go."

"You're pi'soning the air of my front parlour," ses old Cook, opening the winder a little at the top.

"P'r'aps I ain't so bad as you think I am," ses Jack Bates, still looking at Emma, and with that 'e walked over to Charlie and dumped down the money on the table in front of 'im. "Take it," he ses, "and don't borrow any more. I make you a free gift of it. P'r'aps my 'art ain't as black as my face," he ses, turning to Mrs. Cook.

They was all so surprised at fust that they

Digitized by Google

couldn't speak, but old Cook smiled at 'im and put the winder up agin. And Charlie Tagg sat there arf mad with temper, looking as though 'e could eat Jack Bates without any salt, as the saying is.

"I—I can't take it," he ses at last, with a stammer.

"Can't take it? Why not?" ses old Cook, staring. "This gentleman 'as given it to you."

"A free gift," ses Mrs. Cook, smiling at Jack very sweet.

"I can't take it," ses Charlie, winking at Jack to take the money up and give it to 'im outside on the quiet, as arranged. "I 'ave my pride."

"So 'ave I," ses Jack. "Are you going to take it?"

Charlie gave 'im another look. "No," he ses, "I can't take a favour. I borrowed the money and I'll pay it back."

"Very good," ses Jack, taking it up. "It's my money, ain't it?"

"Yes," ses Charlie, taking no notice of Mrs. Cook and 'er husband, wot was both talking

Digitized by Google

to 'im at once, and trying to persuade 'im to alter his mind.

"Then I give it to Miss Emma Cook," ses Jack Bates, putting it into her hands. "Good-night everybody and good luck."

He slammed the front door behind 'im and they 'eard 'im go off down the road as if 'e was going for fire-engines. Charlie sat there for a moment struck all of a heap, and then 'e jumped up and dashed arter 'im. He just saw 'im disappearing round a corner, and he didn't see 'im agin for a couple o' year arterwards, by which time the Sydney gal had 'ad three or four young men arter 'im, and Emma, who 'ad changed her name to Smith, was doing one o' the best businesses in the chandlery line in Poplar.

Digitized by Google

THE CONSTABLE'S MOVE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Constable's Move

MR. BOB GRUMMIT sat in the kitchen with his corduroy-clad legs stretched on the fender. His wife's half-eaten dinner was getting cold on the table; Mr. Grummit, who was badly in need of cheering up, emptied her half-empty glass of beer and wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

"Come away, I tell you," he called. "D'ye hear? Come away. You'll be locked up if you don't."

He gave a little laugh at the sarcasm, and sticking his short pipe in his mouth lurched slowly to the front-room door and scowled at his wife as she lurked at the back of the window watching intently the furniture which was being carried in next door.

"Come away or else you'll be locked up," repeated Mr. Grummit. "You mustn't look at policemen's furniture; it's agin the law."

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Grummit made no reply, but, throwing appearances to the winds, stepped to the window until her nose touched, as a walnut sideboard with bevelled glass back was tenderly borne inside under the personal supervision of Police-Constable Evans.

"They'll be 'aving a pianner next," said the indignant Mr. Grummit, peering from the depths of the room.

"They've got one," responded his wife; "there's the end if it stickin' up in the van."

Mr. Grummit advanced and regarded the end fixedly. "Did you throw all them tin cans and things into their yard wot I told you to?" he demanded.

"He picked up three of 'em while I was upstairs," replied his wife. "I 'eard 'im tell her that they'd come in handy for paint and things."

"That's 'ow coppers get on and buy pianners," said the incensed Mr. Grummit, "sneaking other people's property. I didn't tell you to throw good 'uns over, did I? Wot d'ye mean by it?"

Digitized by Google

Mrs. Grummit made no reply, but watched with bated breath the triumphal entrance of the piano. The carman set it tenderly on the narrow footpath, while P. C. Evans, stooping low, examined it at all points, and Mrs. Evans, raising the lid, struck a few careless chords.

"Showing off," explained Mrs. Grummit, with a half turn; "and she's got fingers like carrots."

"It's a disgrace to Mulberry Gardens to 'ave a copper come and live in it," said the indignant Grummit; "and to come and live next to *me*! —that's what I can't get over. To come and live next door to a man wot has been fined twice, and both times wrong. Why, for two pins I'd go in and smash 'is pianner first and 'im after it. He won't live 'ere long, you take my word for it."

"Why not?" inquired his wife.

"Why?" repeated Mr. Grummit. "Why? Why, becos I'll make the place too 'ot to hold him. Ain't there enough houses in Tunwich without 'im a-coming and living next door to me?"

Digitized by Google

For a whole week the brain concealed in Mr. Grummit's bullet-shaped head worked in vain, and his temper got correspondingly bad. The day after the Evans' arrival he had found his yard littered with tins which he recognized as old acquaintances, and since that time they had travelled backwards and forwards with monotonous regularity. They sometimes made as many as three journeys a day, and on one occasion the heavens opened to drop a battered tin bucket on the back of Mr. Grummit as he was tying his bootlace. Five minutes later he spoke of the outrage to Mr. Evans, who had come out to admire the sunset.

"I heard something fall," said the constable, eyeing the pail curiously.

"You threw it," said Mr. Grummit, breathing furiously.

"Me? Nonsense," said the other, easily. "I was having tea in the parlour with my wife and my mother-in-law, and my brother Joe and his young lady."

"Any more of 'em?" demanded the hapless Mr. Grummit, aghast at this list of witnesses for an alibi.

Digitized by Google

"It ain't a bad pail, if you look at it properly," said the constable. "I should keep it if I was you; unless the owner offers a reward for it. It'll hold enough water for your wants."

Mr. Grummit flung indoors and, after wasting some time concocting impossible measures of retaliation with his sympathetic partner, went off to discuss affairs with his intimates at the *Bricklayers' Arms*. The company, although unanimously agreeing that Mr. Evans ought to be boiled, were miserably deficient in ideas as to the means by which such a desirable end was to be attained.

"Make 'im a laughing-stock, that's the best thing," said an elderly labourer. "The police don't like being laughed at."

"'Ow?" demanded Mr. Grummit, with some asperity.

"There's plenty o' ways," said the old man.

"I should find 'em out fast enough if I 'ad a bucket dropped on my back, I know."

Mr. Grummit made a retort the feebleness of which was somewhat balanced by its ferocity, and subsided into glum silence. His back still

Digitized by Google

ached, but, despite that aid to intellectual effort, the only ways he could imagine of making the constable look foolish contained an almost certain risk of hard labour for himself.

He pondered the question for a week, and meanwhile the tins—to the secret disappointment of Mr. Evans—remained untouched in his yard. For the whole of the time he went about looking, as Mrs. Grummit expressed it, as though his dinner had disagreed with him.

"I've been talking to old Bill Smith," he said, suddenly, as he came in one night.

Mrs. Grummit looked up, and noticed with wifely pleasure that he was looking almost cheerful.

"He's given me a tip," said Mr. Grummit, with a faint smile; "a copper mustn't come into a free-born Englishman's 'ouse unless he's invited."

"Wot of it?" inquired his wife. "You wasn't think of asking him in, was you?"

Mr. Grummit regarded her almost playfully. "If a copper comes in without being

Digitized by Google

told to," he continued, "he gets into trouble for it. Now d'ye see?"

"But he won't come," said the puzzled Mrs. Grummit.

Mr. Grummit winked. "Yes 'e will if you scream loud enough," he retorted. "Where's the copper-stick?"

"Have you gone mad?" demanded his wife, "or do you think I 'ave?"

"You go up into the bedroom," said Mr. Grummit, emphasizing his remarks with his forefinger. "I come up and beat the bed black and blue with the copper-stick; you scream for mercy and call out 'Help!' 'Murder!' and things like that. Don't call out 'Police!' cos Bill ain't sure about that part. Evans comes bursting in to save your life—I'll leave the door on the latch—and there you are. He's sure to get into trouble for it. Bill said so. He's made a study o' that sort o' thing."

Mrs. Grummit pondered this simple plan so long that her husband began to lose patience. At last, against her better sense, she rose and fetched the weapon in question.

Digitized by Google

"And you be careful what you're hitting," she said, as they went upstairs to bed. "We'd better have 'igh words first, I s'pose?"

"You pitch into me with your tongue," said Mr. Grummit, amiably.

Mrs. Grummit, first listening to make sure that the constable and his wife were in the bedroom the other side of the flimsy wall, complied, and in a voice that rose gradually to a piercing falsetto told Mr. Grummit things that had been rankling in her mind for some months. She raked up misdemeanours that he had long since forgotten, and, not content with that, had a fling at the entire Grummit family, beginning with her mother-in-law and ending with Mr. Grummit's youngest sister. The hand that held the copper-stick itched.

"Any more to say?" demanded Mr. Grummit advancing upon her.

Mrs. Grummit emitted a genuine shriek, and Mr. Grummit, suddenly remembering himself, stopped short and attacked the bed with extraordinary fury. The room resounded with the blows, and the efforts of Mrs. Grum-

Digitized by Google

mit were a revelation even to her husband.

"I can hear 'im moving," whispered Mr. Grummit, pausing to take breath.

"*Mur—der*!" wailed his wife. "*Help*! *Help*!"

Mr. Grummit, changing the stick into his left hand, renewed the attack; Mrs. Grummit, whose voice was becoming exhausted, sought a temporary relief in moans.

"Is—he—deaf?" panted the wife-beater, "or wot?"

He knocked over a chair, and Mrs. Grummit contrived another frenzied scream. A loud knocking sounded on the wall.

"*Hel—lp!*" moaned Mrs. Grummit.

"Halloa, there!" came the voice of the constable. "Why don't you keep that baby quiet? We can't get a wink of sleep."

Mr. Grummit dropped the stick on the bed and turned a dazed face to his wife.

"He—he's afraid—to come in," he gasped. "Keep it up, old gal."

He took up the stick again and Mrs. Grummit

Digitized by Google

did her best, but the heart had gone out of the thing, and he was about to give up the task as hopeless when the door below was heard to open with a bang.

"Here he is," cried the jubilant Grummit. "Now!"

His wife responded, and at the same moment the bedroom door was flung open, and her brother, who had been hastily fetched by the neighbours on the other side, burst into the room and with one hearty blow sent Mr. Grummit sprawling.

"Hit my sister, will you?" he roared, as the astounded Mr. Grummit rose. "Take that!"

Mr. Grummit took it, and several other favours, while his wife, tugging at her brother, endeavoured to explain. It was not, however, until Mr. Grummit claimed the usual sanctuary of the defeated by refusing to rise that she could make herself heard.

"Joke?" repeated her brother, incredulously. "Joke?"

Mrs. Grummit in a husky voice explained.

Digitized by Google

Her brother passed from incredulity to amazement and from amazement to mirth. He sat down gurgling, and the indignant face of the injured Grummit only added to his distress.

"Best joke I ever heard in my life," he said, wiping his eyes. "Don't look at me like that, Bob; I can't bear it."

"Get off 'ome," responded Mr. Grummit, glowering at him.

"There's a crowd outside, and half the doors in the place open," said the other. "Well, it's a good job there's no harm done. So long."

He passed, beaming, down the stairs, and Mr. Grummit, drawing near the window, heard him explaining in a broken voice to the neighbours outside. Strong men patted him on the back and urged him gruffly to say what he had to say and laugh afterwards. Mr. Grummit turned from the window, and in a slow and stately fashion prepared to retire for the night. Even the sudden and startling disappearance of Mrs. Grummit as she got into bed failed to move him.

"The bed's broke, Bob," she said faintly.

Digitized by Google

"Beds won't last for ever," he said, shortly; "sleep on the floor."

Mrs. Grummit clambered out, and after some trouble secured the bedclothes and made up a bed in a corner of the room. In a short time she was fast asleep; but her husband, broad awake, spent the night in devising further impracticable schemes for the discomfiture of the foe next door.

He saw Mr. Evans next morning as he passed on his way to work. The constable was at the door smoking in his shirt-sleeves, and Mr. Grummit felt instinctively that he was waiting there to see him pass.

"I heard you last night," said the constable, playfully. "My word! Good gracious!"

"Wot's the matter with you?" demanded Mr. Grummit, stopping short.

The constable stared at him. "She has been knocking you about," he gasped. "Why, it must ha' been *you* screaming, then! I thought it sounded loud. Why don't you go and get a summons and have her locked up? I should be pleased to take her."

Digitized by Google

Mr. Grummit faced him, quivering with passion. "Wot would it cost if I set about you?" he demanded, huskily.

"Two months," said Mr. Evans, smiling serenely; "p'r'aps three."

Mr. Grummit hesitated and his fists clenched nervously. The constable, lounging against his door-post, surveyed him with a dispassionate smile. "That would be besides what you'd get from me," he said, softly.

"Come out in the road," said Mr. Grummit, with sudden violence.

"It's agin the rules," said Mr. Evans; "sorry I can't. Why not go and ask your wife's brother to oblige you?"

He went in laughing and closed the door, and Mr. Grummit, after a frenzied outburst, proceeded on his way, returning the smiles of such acquaintances as he passed with an icy stare or a strongly-worded offer to make them laugh the other side of their face. The rest of the day he spent in working so hard that he had no time to reply to the anxious inquiries of his fellow-workmen.

Digitized by Google

He came home at night glum and silent, the hardship of not being able to give Mr. Evans his deserts without incurring hard labour having weighed on his spirits all day. To avoid the annoyance of the piano next door, which was slowly and reluctantly yielding up "The Last Rose of Summer" note by note, he went out at the back, and the first thing he saw was Mr. Evans mending his path with tins and other bric-a-brac.

"Nothing like it," said the constable, looking up. "Your missus gave 'em to us this morning. A little gravel on top, and there you are."

He turned whistling to his work again, and the other, after endeavouring in vain to frame a suitable reply, took a seat on an inverted wash-tub and lit his pipe. His one hope was that Constable Evans was going to try and cultivate a garden.

The hope was realized a few days later, and Mr. Grummit at the back window sat gloating over a dozen fine geraniums, some lobelias and calceolarias, which decorated the constable's

Digitized by Google

plot of ground. He could not sleep for thinking of them.

He rose early the next morning, and, after remarking to Mrs. Grummit that Mr. Evans's flowers looked as though they wanted rain, went off to his work. The cloud which had been on his spirits for some time had lifted, and he whistled as he walked. The sight of flowers in front windows added to his good humour.

He was still in good spirits when he left off work that afternoon, but some slight hesitation about returning home sent him to the *Bricklayers' Arms* instead. He stayed there until closing time, and then, being still disinclined for home, paid a visit to Bill Smith, who lived the other side of Tunwich. By the time he started for home it was nearly midnight.

The outskirts of the town were deserted and the houses in darkness. The clock of Tunwich church struck twelve, and the last stroke was just dying away as he turned a corner and ran almost into the arms of the man he had been trying to avoid.

Digitized by Google

"Halloa!" said Constable Evans, sharply. "Here, I want a word with you."

Mr. Grummit quailed. "With me, sir?" he said, with involuntary respect.

"What have you been doing to my flowers?" demanded the other, hotly.

"Flowers?" repeated Mr. Grummit, as though the word were new to him. "Flowers? What flowers?"

"You know well enough," retorted the constable. "You got over my fence last night and smashed all my flowers down."

"You be careful wot you're saying," urged Mr. Grummit. "Why, I love flowers. You don't mean to tell me that all them beautiful flowers wot you put in so careful 'as been spoiled?"

"You know all about it," said the constable, choking. "I shall take out a summons against you for it."

"Ho!" said Mr. Grummit. "And wot time do you say it was when I done it?"

"Never you mind the time," said the other.

"Cos it's important," said Mr. Grummit.

Digitized by Google

"My wife's brother—the one you're so fond of—slept in my 'ouse last night. He was ill arf the night, pore chap; but, come to think of it, it'll make 'im a good witness for my innocence."

"If I wasn't a policeman," said Mr. Evans, speaking with great deliberation, "I'd take hold o' you, Bob Grummit, and I'd give you the biggest hiding you've ever had in your life."

"If you wasn't a policeman," said Mr. Grummit, yearningly, "I'd arf murder you."

The two men eyed each other wistfully, loth to part.

"If I gave you what you deserve I should get into trouble," said the constable.

"If I gave you a quarter of wot you ought to 'ave I should go to quod," sighed Mr. Grummit.

"I wouldn't put you there," said the constable, earnestly; "I swear I wouldn't."

"Everything's beautiful and quiet," said Mr. Grummit, trembling with eagerness, "and I wouldn't say a word to a soul. I'll take my solemn davit I wouldn't."

Digitized by Google

"When I think o' my garden——" began the constable. With a sudden movement he knocked off Mr. Grummit's cap, and then, seizing him by the coat, began to hustle him along the road. In the twinkling of an eye they had closed.

Tunwich church chimed the half-hour as they finished, and Mr. Grummit, forgetting his own injuries, stood smiling at the wreck before him. The constable's helmet had been smashed and trodden on; his uniform was torn and covered with blood and dirt, and his good looks marred for a fortnight at least. He stooped with a groan, and, recovering his helmet, tried mechanically to punch it into shape. He stuck the battered relic on his head, and Mr. Grummit fell back awed, despite himself.

"It was a fair fight," he stammered.

The constable waved him away. "Get out o' my sight before I change my mind," he said, fiercely; "and mind, if you say a word about this it'll be the worse for you."

"Do you think I've gone mad?" said the

Digitized by Google

other. He took another look at his victim and, turning away, danced fantastically along the road home. The constable, making his way to a gas-lamp, began to inspect damages.

They were worse even than he had thought, and, leaning against the lamp-post, he sought in vain for an explanation that, in the absence of a prisoner, would satisfy the inspector. A button which was hanging by a thread fell tinkling on to the footpath, and he had just picked it up and placed it in his pocket when a faint distant outcry broke upon his ear.

He turned and walked as rapidly as his condition would permit in the direction of the noise. It became louder and more imperative, and cries of "Police!" became distinctly audible. He quickened into a run, and turning a corner beheld a little knot of people standing at the gate of a large house. Other people only partially clad were hastening towards them. The constable arrived out of breath.

"Better late than never," said the owner of the house, sarcastically.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Evans, breathing painfully, supported himself with his hand on the fence.

"They went that way, but I suppose you didn't see them," continued the householder. "Halloa!" he added, as somebody opened the hall door and the constable's damaged condition became visible in the gas-light. "Are you hurt?"

"Yes," said Mr. Evans, who was trying hard to think clearly. To gain time he blew a loud call on his whistle.

"The rascals!" continued the other. "I think I should know the big chap with a beard again, but the others were too quick for me."

Mr. Evans blew his whistle again—thoughtfully. The opportunity seemed too good to lose.

"Did they get anything?" he inquired.

"Not a thing," said the owner, triumphantly. "I was disturbed just in time."

The constable gave a slight gulp. "I saw the three running by the side of the road," he said, slowly. "Their behaviour seemed suspicious, so I collared the big one, but they set

Digitized by Google

on me like wild cats. They had me down three times; the last time I laid my head open against the kerb, and when I came to my senses again they had gone."

He took off his battered helmet with a flourish and, amid a murmur of sympathy, displayed a nasty cut on his head. A sergeant and a constable, both running, appeared round the corner and made towards them.

"Get back to the station and make your report," said the former, as Constable Evans, in a somewhat defiant voice, repeated his story. "You've done your best; I can see that."

Mr. Evans, enacting to perfection the part of a wounded hero, limped painfully off, praying devoutly as he went that the criminals might make good their escape. If not, he reflected that the word of a policeman was at least equal to that of three burglars.

He repeated his story at the station, and, after having his head dressed, was sent home and advised to keep himself quiet for a day or two. He was off duty for four days, and, the *Tunwich Gazette* having devoted a column to

Digitized by Google

the affair, headed "A Gallant Constable," modestly secluded himself from the public gaze for the whole of that time.

To Mr. Grummit, who had read the article in question until he could have repeated it backwards, this modesty was particularly trying. The constable's yard was deserted and the front door ever closed. Once Mr. Grummit even went so far as to tap with his nails on the front parlour window, and the only response was the sudden lowering of the blind. It was not until a week afterwards that his eyes were gladdened by a sight of the constable sitting in his yard; and fearing that even then he might escape him, he ran out on tip-toe and put his face over the fence before the latter was aware of his presence.

"Wot about that 'ere burglary?" he demanded in truculent tones.

"Good evening, Grummit," said the constable, with a patronizing air.

"Wot about that burglary?" repeated Mr. Grummit, with a scowl. "I don't believe you ever saw a burglar."

Digitized by Google

Mr. Evans rose and stretched himself gracefully. "You'd better run indoors, my good man," he said, slowly.

"Telling all them lies about burglars," continued the indignant Mr. Grummit, producing his newspaper and waving it. "Why, *I* gave you that black eye, *I* smashed your 'elmet, *I* cut your silly 'ead open, *I* ——"

"You've been drinking," said the other, severely.

"You mean to say I didn't?" demanded Mr. Grummit, ferociously.

Mr. Evans came closer and eyed him steadily. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, calmly.

Mr. Grummit, about to speak, stopped appalled at such hardihood.

"Of course, if you mean to say that you were one o' them burglars," continued the constable, "why, say it and I'll take you with pleasure. Come to think of it, I did seem to remember one o' their voices."

Mr. Grummit, with his eyes fixed on the

Digitized by Google

other's, backed a couple of yards and breathed heavily.

"About your height, too, he was," mused the constable. "I hope for your sake you haven't been saying to anybody else what you said to me just now."

Mr. Grummit shook his head. "Not a word," he faltered.

"That's all right, then," said Mr. Evans. "I shouldn't like to be hard on a neighbour; not that we shall be neighbours much longer."

Mr. Grummit, feeling that a reply was expected of him, gave utterance to a feeble "Oh!"

"No," said Mr. Evans, looking round disparagingly. "It ain't good enough for us now; I was promoted to sergeant this morning. A sergeant can't live in a common place like this."

Mr. Grummit, a prey to a sickening fear, drew near the fence again. "A—a sergeant?" he stammered.

Mr. Evans smiled and gazed carefully at a distant cloud. "For my bravery with them

Digitized by Google

burglars the other night, Grummit," he said, modestly. "I might have waited years if it hadn't been for them."

He nodded to the frantic Grummit and turned away; Mr. Grummit, without any adieu at all, turned and crept back to the house.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BOB'S REDEMPTION

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Bob's Redemption

"GRATITOODE!" said the night-watchman, with a hard laugh. "*Hmf!* Don't talk to me about gratitoode; I've seen too much of it. If people wot I've helped in my time 'ad only done arf their dooty—arf, mind you—I should be riding in my carriage."

Forgetful of the limitations of soap-boxes he attempted to illustrate his remark by lolling, and nearly went over backwards. Recovering himself by an effort he gazed sternly across the river and smoked fiercely. It was evident that he was brooding over an ill-used past.

'Arry Thomson was one of them, he said, at last. For over six months I wrote all 'is love-letters for him, 'e being an iggernerant sort of man and only being able to do the kisses at the end, which he always insisted on doing 'imself: being jealous. Only three weeks arter he was

Digitized by Google

married 'e come up to where I was standing one day and set about me without saying a word. I was a single man at the time and I didn't understand it. My idea was that he 'ad gone mad, and, being pretty artful and always 'aving a horror of mad people, I let 'im chase me into a police-station. Leastways, I would ha' let 'im, but he didn't come, and I all but got fourteen days for being drunk and disorderly.

Then there was Bill Clark. He 'ad been keeping comp'ny with a gal and got tired of it, and to oblige 'im I went to her and told 'er he was a married man with five children. Bill was as pleased as Punch at fust, but as soon as she took up with another chap he came round to see me and said as I'd ruined his life. We 'ad words about it—naturally—and I did ruin it then to the extent of a couple o' ribs. I went to see 'im in the horsepittle—a place I've always been fond of—and the langwidge he used to me was so bad that they sent for the Sister to 'ear it.

That's on'y two out of dozens I could name.

Digitized by Google

Arf the unpleasantnesses in my life 'ave come out of doing kindnesses to people, and all the gratitoode I've 'ad for it I could put in a pint-pot with a pint o' beer already in it.

The only case o' real gratitoode I ever heard of 'appened to a shipmate o' mine—a young chap named Bob Evans. Coming home from Auckland in a barque called the *Dragon Fly* he fell overboard, and another chap named George Crofts, one o' the best swimmers I ever knew, went overboard arter 'im and saved his life.

We was hardly moving at the time, and the sea was like a duck pond, but to 'ear Bob Evans talk you'd ha' thought that George Crofts was the bravest-'arted chap that ever lived. He 'adn't liked him afore, same as the rest of us, George being a sly, mean sort o' chap; but arter George 'ad saved his life 'e couldn't praise 'im enough. He said that so long as he 'ad a crust George should share it, and wotever George asked 'im he should have.

The unfortnit part of it was that George took 'im at his word, and all the rest of the v'y'ge he acted as though Bob belonged to 'im,

Digitized by Google

and by the time we got into the London river Bob couldn't call his soul 'is own. He used to take a room when he was ashore and live very steady, as 'e was saving up to get married, and as soon as he found that out George invited 'imself to stay with him.

"It won't cost you a bit more," he ses, "not if you work it properly."

Bob didn't work it properly, but George having saved his life, and never letting 'im forget it, he didn't like to tell him so. He thought he'd let 'im see gradual that he'd got to be careful because of 'is gal, and the fust evening they was ashore 'e took 'im along with 'im there to tea.

Gerty Mitchell—that was the gal's name—'adn't heard of Bob's accident, and when she did she gave a little scream, and putting 'er arms round his neck, began to kiss 'im right in front of George and her mother.

"You ought to give him one too," ses Mrs. Mitchell, pointing to George.

George wiped 'is mouth on the back of his 'and, but Gerty pretended not to 'ear.

Digitized by Google

"Fancy if you'd been drownded!" she ses, hugging Bob agin.

"He was pretty near," ses George, shaking his 'ead. "I'm a pore swimmer, but I made up my mind either to save 'im or else go down to a watery grave myself."

He wiped his mouth on the back of his 'and agin, but all the notice Gerty took of it was to send her young brother Ted out for some beer. Then they all 'ad supper together, and Mrs. Mitchell drank good luck to George in a glass o' beer, and said she 'oped that 'er own boy would grow up like him. "Let 'im grow up a good and brave man, that's all I ask," she ses. "I don't care about 'is looks."

"He might have both," ses George, sharp-like. "Why not?"

Mrs. Mitchell said she supposed he might, and then she cuffed young Ted's ears for making a noise while 'e was eating, and then cuffed 'im agin for saying that he'd finished 'is supper five minutes ago.

George and Bob walked 'ome together, and all the way there George said wot a pretty gal

Digitized by Google

Gerty was and 'ow lucky it was for Bob that he 'adn't been drownded. He went round to tea with 'im the next day to Mrs. Mitchell's, and arter tea, when Bob and Gerty said they was going out to spend the evening together, got 'imself asked too.

They took a tram-car and went to a music-hall, and Bob paid for the three of 'em. George never seemed to think of putting his 'and in his pocket, and even arter the music-hall, when they all went into a shop and 'ad stewed eels, he let Bob pay.

As I said afore, Bob Evans was chock-full of gratefulness, and it seemed only fair that he shouldn't grumble at spending a little over the man wot 'ad risked 'is life to save his; but wot with keeping George at his room, and paying for 'im every time they went out, he was spending a lot more money than 'e could afford.

"You're on'y young once, Bob," George said to him when 'e made a remark one arternoon as to the fast way his money was going, "and if it hadn't ha' been for me you'd never 'ave lived to grow old."

Digitized by Google

Wot with spending the money and always 'aving George with them when they went out, it wasn't long afore Bob and Gerty 'ad a quarrel. "I don't like a pore-spirited man," she ses. "Two's company and three's none, and, besides, why can't he pay for 'imself? He's big enough. Why should you spend your money on 'im? He never pays a farthing."

Bob explained that he couldn't say anything because 'e owed his life to George, but 'e might as well 'ave talked to a lamp-post. The more he argued the more angry Gerty got, and at last she ses, "Two's company and three's none, and if you and me can't go out without George Crofts, then me and 'im 'll go out without you."

She was as good as her word, too, and the next night, while Bob 'ad gone out to get some 'bacca, she went off alone with George. It was ten o'clock afore they came back agin, and Gerty's eyes were all shining and 'er cheeks as pink as roses. She shut 'er mother up like a concertina the moment she began to find fault with 'er, and at supper she sat next

Digitized by Google

to George and laughed at everything 'e said.

George and Bob walked all the way 'ome arter supper without saying a word, but arter they got to their room George took a side-look at Bob, and then he ses, suddenlike, "Look 'ere! I saved your life, didn't I?"

"You did," ses Bob, "and I thank you for it."

"I saved your life," ses George agin, very solemn. "If it hadn't ha' been for me you couldn't ha' married *anybody*."

"That's true," ses Bob.

"Me and Gerty 'ave been having a talk," ses George, bending down to undo his boots. "We've been getting on very well together; you can't 'elp your feelings, and the long and the short of it is, the pore gal has fallen in love with me."

Bob didn't say a word.

"If you look at it this way it's fair enough," ses George. "I gave you your life and you give me your gal. We're quits now. You don't owe me anything and I don't owe you

Digitized by Google

anything. That's the way Gerty puts it, and she told me to tell you so."

"If—if she don't want me I'm agreeable," ses Bob, in a choking voice. "We'll call it quits, and next time I tumble overboard I 'ope you won't be handy."

He took Gerty's photygraph out of 'is box and handed it to George. "You've got more right to it now than wot I 'ave," he ses. "I shan't go round there any more; I shall look out for a ship to-morrow."

George Crofts said that perhaps it was the best thing he could do, and 'e asked 'im in a offhand sort o' way 'ow long the room was paid up for.

Mrs. Mitchell 'ad a few words to say about it next day, but Gerty told 'er to save 'er breath for walking upstairs. The on'y thing that George didn't like when they went out was that young Ted was with them, but Gerty said she preferred it till she knew 'im better; and she 'ad so much to say about his noble behaviour in saving life that George gave way. They went out looking at the shops, George

Digitized by Google

thinking that that was the cheapest way of spending an evening, and they were as happy as possible till Gerty saw a brooch she liked so much in a window that he couldn't get 'er away.

"It *is* a beauty," she ses. "I don't know when I've seen a brooch I liked better. Look here! Let's all guess the price and then go in and see who's right."

They 'ad their guesses, and then they went in and asked, and as soon as Gerty found that it was only three-and-sixpence she began to feel in her pocket for 'er purse, just like your wife does when you go out with 'er, knowing all the time that it's on the mantelpiece with twopence-ha'penny and a cough lozenge in it.

"I must ha' left it at 'ome," she ses, looking at George.

"Just wot I've done," ses George, arter patting 'is pockets.

Gerty bit 'er lips and, for a minute or two, be civil to George she could not. Then she gave a little smile and took 'is arm agin, and they walked on talking and laughing till she

Digitized by Google

turned round of a sudden and asked a big chap as was passing wot 'e was shoving 'er for.

"Shoving you?" ses he. "Wot do you think I want to shove *you* for?"

"Don't you talk to me," ses Gerty, firing up. "George, make 'im beg my pardon."

"You ought to be more careful," ses George, in a gentle sort o' way.

"Make 'im beg my pardon," ses Gerty, stamping 'er foot; "if he don't, knock 'im down."

"Yes, knock 'im down," ses the big man, taking hold o' George's cap and rumpling his 'air.

Pore George, who was never much good with his fists, hit 'im in the chest, and the next moment he was on 'is back in the middle o' the road wondering wot had 'appened to 'im. By the time 'e got up the other man was arf a mile away; and young Ted stepped up and wiped 'im down with a pocket-'andkerchief while Gerty explained to 'im 'ow she saw 'im slip on a piece o' banana peel.

"It's 'ard lines," she ses; "but never mind,

Digitized by Google

you frightened 'im away, and I don't wonder at it. You do look terrible when you're angry, George; I didn't know you."

She praised 'im all the way 'ome, and if it 'adn't been for his mouth and nose George would 'ave enjoyed it more than 'e did. She told 'er mother how 'e had flown at a big man wot 'ad insulted her, and Mrs. Mitchell shook her 'ead at 'im and said his bold spirit would lead 'im into trouble afore he 'ad done.

They didn't seem to be able to make enough of 'im, and next day when he went round Gerty was so upset at the sight of 'is bruises that he thought she was going to cry. When he had 'ad his tea she gave 'im a cigar she had bought for 'im herself, and when he 'ad finished smoking it she smiled at him, and said that she was going to take 'im out for a pleasant evening to try and make up to 'im for wot he 'ad suffered for 'er.

"We're all going to stand treat to each other," she ses. "Bob always would insist on paying for everything, but I like to feel a bit

Digitized by Google

independent. Give and take—that's the way I like to do things."

"There's nothing like being independent," ses George. "Bob ought to ha' known that."

"I'm sure it's the best plan," ses Gerty. "Now, get your 'at on. We're going to a theayter, and Ted shall pay the 'bus fares."

George wanted to ask about the theayter, but 'e didn't like to, and arter Gerty was dressed they went out and Ted paid the 'bus fares like a man.

"Here you are," ses Gerty, as the 'bus stopped outside the theayter. "Hurry up and get the tickets, George; ask for three upper circles."

She bustled George up to the pay place, and as soon as she 'ad picked out the seats she grabbed 'old of the tickets and told George to make haste.

"Twelve shillings it is," ses the man, as George put down arf a crown.

"Twelve?" ses George, beginning to stammer. "Twelve? Twelve? Twel——?"

Digitized by Google

"Twelve shillings," ses the man; "three upper circles you've 'ad."

George was going to fetch Gerty back and 'ave cheaper seats, but she 'ad gone inside with young Ted, and at last, arter making an awful fuss, he paid the rest o' the money and rushed in arter her, arf crazy at the idea o' spending so much money.

"Make 'aste," ses Gerty, afore he could say anything; "the band 'as just begun."

She started running upstairs, and she was so excited that, when they got their seats and George started complaining about the price, she didn't pay any attention to wot he was saying, but kept pointing out ladies' dresses to 'im in w'ispers and wondering wot they 'ad paid for them. George gave it up at last, and then he sat wondering whether he 'ad done right arter all in taking Bob's gal away from him.

Gerty enjoyed it very much, but when the curtain came down after the first act she leaned back in her chair and looked up at George and said she felt faint and thought she'd like to 'ave an ice-cream. "And you 'ave one too, dear,"

Digitized by Google

she ses, when young Ted 'ad got up and beckoned to the gal, "and Ted 'ud like one too, I'm sure."

She put her 'ead on George's shoulder and looked up at 'im. Then she put her 'and on his and stroked it, and George, reckoning that arter all ice-creams were on'y a ha'penny or at the most a penny each, altered 'is mind about not spending any more money and ordered three.

The way he carried on when the gal said they was three shillings was alarming. At fust 'e thought she was 'aving a joke with 'im, and it took another gal and the fireman and an old gentleman wot was sitting behind 'im to persuade 'im different. He was so upset that 'e couldn't eat his arter paying for it, and Ted and Gerty had to finish it for 'im.

"They're expensive, but they're worth the money," ses Gerty. "You are good to me, George. I could go on eating 'em all night, but you mustn't fling your money away like this always."

"I'll see to that," ses George, very bitter.

Digitized by Google

"I thought we was going to stand treat to each other? That was the idea, I understood."

"So we are," ses Gerty. "Ted stood the 'bus fares, didn't he?"

"He did," ses George, "wot there was of 'em; but wot about you?"

"*Me?*" ses Gerty, drawing her 'ead back and staring at 'im. "Why, 'ave you forgot that cigar already, George?"

George opened 'is mouth, but 'e couldn't speak a word. He sat looking at 'er and making a gasping noise in 'is throat, and fortunately just as 'e got 'is voice back the curtain went up agin, and everybody said, "*H'sh!*"

He couldn't enjoy the play at all, 'e was so upset, and he began to see more than ever 'ow wrong he 'ad been in taking Bob's gal away from 'im. He walked downstairs into the street like a man in a dream, with Gerty sticking to 'is arm and young Ted treading on 'is heels behind.

"Now, you mustn't waste any more money, George," ses Gerty, when they got outside. "We'll walk 'ome."

Digitized by Google

George 'ad got arf a mind to say something about a 'bus, but he remembered in time that very likely young Ted hadn't got any more money. Then Gerty said she knew a short cut, and she took them, walking along little, dark, narrow streets and places, until at last, just as George thought they must be pretty near 'ome, she began to dab her eyes with 'er pocket-'andkerchief and say she'd lost 'er way.

"You two go 'ome and leave me," she ses, arf crying. "I can't walk another step."

"Where are we?" ses George, looking round.

"I don't know," ses Gerty. "I couldn't tell you if you paid me. I must 'ave taken a wrong turning. Oh, hurrah! Here's a cab!"

Afore George could stop 'er she held up 'er umbrella, and a 'ansom cab, with bells on its horse, crossed the road and pulled up in front of 'em. Ted nipped in first and Gerty followed 'im.

"Tell 'im the address, dear, and make 'aste and get in," ses Gerty.

George told the cabman, and then he got

Digitized by Google

in and sat on Ted's knee, partly on Gerty's umbrella, and mostly on nothing.

"You *are* good to me, George," ses Gerty, touching the back of 'is neck with the brim of her hat. "It ain't often I get a ride in a cab. All the time I was keeping company with Bob we never 'ad one once. I only wish I'd got the money to pay for it."

George, who was going to ask a question, stopped 'imself, and then he kept striking matches and trying to read all about cab fares on a bill in front of 'im.

"'Ow are we to know 'ow many miles it is?" he ses, at last.

"I don't know," ses Gerty; "leave it to the cabman. It's his bisness, ain't it? And if 'e don't know he must suffer for it."

There was hardly a soul in Gerty's road when they got there, but afore George 'ad settled with the cabman there was a policeman moving the crowd on and arf the winders in the road up. By the time George had paid 'im and the cabman 'ad told him wot 'e looked like, Gerty and Ted 'ad disappeared indoors,

Digitized by Google

all the lights was out, and, in a state o' mind that won't bear thinking of, George walked 'ome to his lodging.

Bob was asleep when he got there, but 'e woke 'im up and told 'im about it, and then arter a time he said that he thought Bob ought to pay arf because he 'ad saved 'is life.

"Cert'nly not," ses Bob. "We're quits now; that was the arrangement. I only wish it was me spending the money on her; I shouldn't grumble."

George didn't get a wink o' sleep all night for thinking of the money he 'ad spent, and next day when he went round he 'ad almost made up 'is mind to tell Bob that if 'e liked to pay up the money he could 'ave Gerty back; but she looked so pretty, and praised 'im up so much for 'is generosity, that he began to think better of it. One thing 'e was determined on, and that was never to spend money like that agin for fifty Gertys.

There was a very sensible man there that evening that George liked very much. His name was Uncle Joe, and when Gerty was

Digitized by Google

praising George to 'is face for the money he 'ad been spending, Uncle Joe, instead o' looking pleased, shook his 'ead over it.

"Young people will be young people, I know," he ses, "but still I don't approve of extravagance. Bob Evans would never 'ave spent all that money over you."

"Bob Evans ain't everybody," ses Mrs. Mitchell, standing up for Gerty.

"He was steady, anyway," ses Uncle Joe. "Besides, Gerty ought not to ha' let Mr. Crofts spend his money like that. She could ha' prevented it if she'd ha' put 'er foot down and insisted on it."

He was so solemn about it that everybody began to feel a bit upset, and Gerty borrowed Ted's pocket-'andkerchief, and then wiped 'er eyes on the cuff of her dress instead.

"Well, well," ses Uncle Joe; "I didn't mean to be 'ard, but don't do it no more. You are young people, and can't afford it."

"We must 'ave a little pleasure sometimes," ses Gerty.

"Yes, I know," ses Uncle Joe; "but there's

Digitized by Google

moderation in everything. Look 'ere, it's time somebody paid for Mr. Crofts. To-morrow's Saturday, and, if you like, I'll take you all to the Crystal Palace."

Gerty jumped up off of 'er chair and kissed 'im, while Mrs. Mitchell said she knew 'is bark was worse than 'is bite, and asked 'im who was wasting his money now?

"You meet me at London Bridge Station at two o'clock," ses Uncle Joe, getting up to go. "It ain't extravagance for a man as can afford it."

He shook 'ands with George Crofts and went, and, arter George 'ad stayed long enough to hear a lot o' things about Uncle Joe which made 'im think they'd get on very well together, he went off too.

They all turned up very early the next arternoon, and Gerty was dressed so nice that George couldn't take his eyes off of her. Besides her there was Mrs. Mitchell and Ted and a friend of 'is named Charlie Smith.

They waited some time, but Uncle Joe didn't turn up, and they all got looking at the

Digitized by Google

clock and talking about it, and 'oping he wouldn't make 'em miss the train.

"Here he comes!" ses Ted, at last.

Uncle Joe came rushing in, puffing and blowing as though he'd bust. "Take 'em on by this train, will you?" he ses, catching 'old o' George by the arm. "I've just been stopped by a bit o' business I must do, and I'll come on by the next, or as soon arter as I can."

He rushed off again, puffing and blowing his 'ardest, in such a hurry that he forgot to give George the money for the tickets. However, George borrowed a pencil of Mrs. Mitchell in the train, and put down on paper 'ow much they cost, and Mrs. Mitchell said if George didn't like to remind 'im she would.

They left young Ted and Charlie to stay near the station when they got to the Palace, Uncle Joe 'aving forgotten to say where he'd meet 'em, but train arter train came in without 'im, and at last the two boys gave it up.

"We're sure to run across 'im sooner or later," ses Gerty. "Let's 'ave something to eat; I'm so hungry."

Digitized by Google

George said something about buns and milk, but Gerty took 'im up sharp. "Buns and milk?" she ses. "Why, uncle would never forgive us if we spoilt his treat like that."

She walked into a refreshment place and they 'ad cold meat and bread and pickles and beer and tarts and cheese, till even young Ted said he'd 'ad enough, but still they couldn't see any signs of Uncle Joe. They went on to the roundabouts to look for 'im, and then into all sorts o' shows at sixpence a head, but still there was no signs of 'im, and George had 'ad to start on a fresh bit o' paper to put down wot he'd spent.

"I suppose he must ha' been detained on important business," ses Gerty, at last.

"Unless it's one of 'is jokes," ses Mrs. Mitchell, shaking her 'ead. "You know wot your uncle is, Gerty."

"There now, I never thought o' that," ses Gerty, with a start; "p'r'aps it is."

"*Joke?*" ses George, choking and staring from one to the other.

"I was wondering where he'd get the money

Digitized by Google

from," ses Mrs. Mitchell to Gerty. "I see it all now; I never see such a man for a bit o' fun in all my born days. And the solemn way he went on last night, too. Why, he must ha' been laughing in 'is sleeve all the time. It's as good as a play."

"Look here!" ses George, 'ardly able to speak; "do you mean to tell me he never *meant* to come?"

"I'm afraid not," ses Mrs. Mitchell, "knowing wot he is. But don't you worry; I'll give him a bit o' my mind when I see 'im."

George Crofts felt as though he'd burst, and then 'e got his breath, and the things 'e said about Uncle Joe was so awful that Mrs. Mitchell told the boys to go away.

"How dare you talk of my uncle like that?" ses Gerty, firing up.

"You forget yourself, George," ses Mrs. Mitchell. "You'll like 'im when you get to know 'im better."

"Don't you call me George," ses George Crofts, turning on 'er. "I've been done, that's wot I've been. I 'ad fourteen pounds

Digitized by Google

when I was paid off, and it's melting like butter."

"Well, we've enjoyed ourselves," ses Gerty, "and that's what money was given us for. I'm sure those two boys 'ave had a splendid time, thanks to you. Don't go and spoil all by a little bit o' temper."

"Temper!" ses George, turning on her. "I've done with you, I wouldn't marry you if you was the on'y gal in the world. I wouldn't marry you if you paid me."

"Oh, indeed!" ses Gerty; "but if you think you can get out of it like that you're mistaken. I've lost my young man through you, and I'm not going to lose you too. I'll send my two big cousins round to see you to-morrow."

"They won't put up with no nonsense, I can tell you," ses Mrs. Mitchell.

She called the boys to her, and then she and Gerty, arter holding their 'eads very high and staring at George, went off and left 'im alone. He went straight off 'ome, counting 'is money all the way and trying to make it more, and, arter telling Bob 'ow he'd been treated, and

Digitized by Google

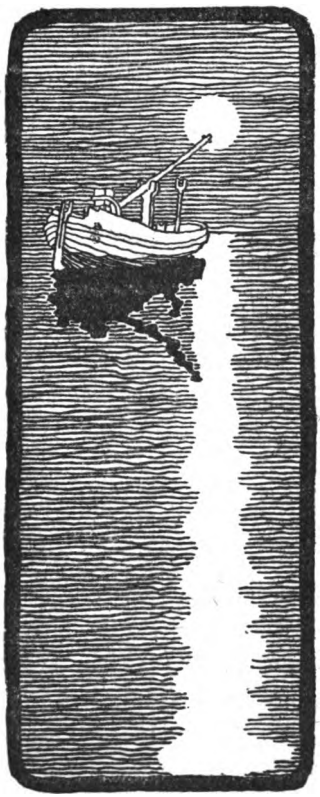
trying hard to get 'im to go shares in his losses, packed up his things and cleared out, all boiling over with temper.

Bob was so dazed he couldn't make head or tail out of it, but 'e went round to see Gerty the first thing next morning, and she explained things to him.

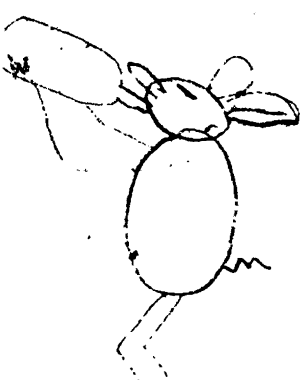
"I don't know when I've enjoyed myself so much," she ses, wiping her eyes, "but I've had enough gadding about for once, and if you come round this evening we'll have a nice quiet time together looking at the furniture shops."

Digitized by Google

OVER THE SIDE



Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Over the Side

OF all classes of men, those who follow the sea are probably the most prone to superstition. Afloat upon the black waste of waters, at the mercy of wind and sea, with vast depths and strange creatures below them, a belief in the supernatural is easier than ashore, under the cheerful gas-lamps. Strange stories of the sea are plentiful, and an incident which happened within my own experience has made me somewhat chary of dubbing a man fool or coward because he has encountered something he cannot explain. There are stories of the supernatural with prosaic sequels; there are others to which the sequel has never been published.

I was fifteen years old at the time, and as my father, who had a strong objection to the sea,

Digitized by Google

would not apprentice me to it, I shipped before the mast on a sturdy little brig called the *Endeavour,* bound for Riga. She was a small craft, but the skipper was as fine a seaman as one could wish for, and, in fair weather, an easy man to sail under. Most boys have a rough time of it when they first go to sea, but, with a strong sense of what was good for me, I had attached myself to a brawny, good-natured infant, named Bill Smith, and it was soon understood that whoever hit me struck Bill by proxy. Not that the crew were particularly brutal, but a sound cuffing occasionally is held by most seamen to be beneficial to a lad's health and morals. The only really spiteful fellow among them was a man named Jem Dadd. He was a morose, sallow-looking man, of about forty, with a strong taste for the supernatural, and a stronger taste still for frightening his fellows with it. I have seen Bill almost afraid to go on deck of a night for his trick at the wheel, after a few of his reminiscences. Rats were a favourite topic with him, and he would never allow one to be killed if

Digitized by Google

he could help it, for he claimed for them that they were the souls of drowned sailors, hence their love of ships and their habit of leaving them when they became unseaworthy. He was a firm believer in the transmigration of souls, some idea of which he had, no doubt, picked up in Eastern ports, and gave his shivering auditors to understand that his arrangements for his own immediate future were already perfected.

We were six or seven days out when a strange thing happened. Dadd had the second watch one night, and Bill was to relieve him. They were not very strict aboard the brig in fair weather, and when a man's time was up he just made the wheel fast, and, running for'ard, shouted down the fo'c's'le. On this night I happened to awake suddenly, in time to see Bill slip out of his bunk and stand by me, rubbing his red eyelids with his knuckles.

"Dadd's giving me a long time," he whispered, seeing that I was awake; "it's a whole hour after his time."

He pattered up on deck, and I was just turn-

Digitized by Google

ing over, thankful that I was too young to have a watch to keep, when he came softly down again, and, taking me by the shoulders, shook me roughly.

"Jack," he whispered. "Jack."

I raised myself on my elbows, and, in the light of the smoking lamp, saw that he was shaking all over.

"Come on deck," he said, thickly.

I put on my clothes, and followed him quietly to the sweet, cool air above. It was a beautiful clear night, but, from his manner, I looked nervously around for some cause of alarm. I saw nothing. The deck was deserted, except for the solitary figure at the wheel.

"Look at him," whispered Bill, bending a contorted face to mine.

I walked aft a few steps, and Bill followed slowly. Then I saw that Jem Dadd was leaning forward clumsily on the wheel, with his hands clenched on the spokes.

"He's asleep," said I, stopping short.

Bill breathed hard. "He's in a queer

Digitized by Google

sleep," said he; "kind o' trance more like. Go closer."

I took fast hold of Bill's sleeve, and we both went. The light of the stars was sufficient to show that Dadd's face was very white, and that his dim, black eyes were wide open, and staring in a very strange and dreadful manner straight before him.

"Dadd," said I, softly, "Dadd!"

There was no reply, and, with a view of arousing him, I tapped one sinewy hand as it gripped the wheel, and even tried to loosen it.

He remained immovable, and, suddenly with a great cry, my courage deserted me, and Bill and I fairly bolted down into the cabin and woke the skipper.

Then we saw how it was with Jem, and two strong seamen forcibly loosened the grip of those rigid fingers, and, laying him on the deck, covered him with a piece of canvas. The rest of the night two men stayed at the wheel, and, gazing fearfully at the outline of the canvas, longed for dawn.

It came at last, and, breakfast over, the body

Digitized by Google

was sewn up in canvas, and the skipper held a short service compiled from a Bible which belonged to the mate, and what he remembered of the Burial Service proper. Then the corpse went overboard with a splash, and the men, after standing awkwardly together for a few minutes, slowly dispersed to their duties.

For the rest of that day we were all very quiet and restrained; pity for the dead man being mingled with a dread of taking the wheel when night came.

"The wheel's haunted," said the cook, solemnly; "mark my words, there's more of you will be took the same way Dadd was."

The cook, like myself, had no watch to keep.

The men bore up pretty well until night came on again, and then they unanimously resolved to have a double watch. The cook, sorely against his will, was impressed into the service, and I, glad to oblige my patron, agreed to stay up with Bill.

Some of the pleasure had vanished by the time night came, and I seemed only just to

Digitized by Google

have closed my eyes when Bill came, and, with a rough shake or two, informed me that the time had come. Any hope that I might have had of escaping the ordeal was at once dispelled by his expectant demeanour, and the helpful way in which he assisted me with my clothes, and, yawning terribly, I followed him on deck.

The night was not so clear as the preceding one, and the air was chilly, with a little moisture in it. I buttoned up my jacket, and thrust my hands in my pockets.

"Everything quiet?" asked Bill as he stepped up and took the wheel.

"Ay, ay," said Roberts, "quiet as the grave," and, followed by his willing mate, he went below.

I sat on the deck by Bill's side as, with a light touch on the wheel, he kept the brig to her course. It was weary work sitting there, doing nothing, and thinking of the warm berth below, and I believe that I should have fallen asleep, but that my watchful companion stirred me with his foot whenever he saw me nodding.

Digitized by Google

I suppose I must have sat there, shivering and yawning, for about an hour, when, tired of inactivity, I got up and went and leaned over the side of the vessel. The sound of the water gurgling and lapping by was so soothing that I began to doze.

I was recalled to my senses by a smothered cry from Bill, and, running to him, I found him staring to port in an intense and uncomfortable fashion. At my approach, he took one hand from the wheel, and gripped my arm so tightly that I was like to have screamed with the pain of it.

"Jack," said he, in a shaky voice, "while you was away something popped its head up, and looked over the ship's side."

"You've been dreaming," said I, in a voice which was a very fair imitation of Bill's own.

"Dreaming," repeated Bill, "dreaming! Ah, *look there!*"

He pointed with outstretched finger, and my heart seemed to stop beating as I saw a man's head appear above the side. For a brief space it peered at us in silence, and then

Digitized by Google

a dark figure sprang like a cat on to the deck, and stood crouching a short distance away.

A mist came before my eyes, and my tongue failed me, but Bill let off a roar, such as I have never heard before or since. It was answered from below, both aft and for'ard, and the men came running up on deck just as they left their beds.

"What's up?" shouted the skipper, glancing aloft.

For answer, Bill pointed to the intruder, and the men, who had just caught sight of him, came up and formed a compact knot by the wheel.

"Come over the side, it did," panted Bill, "come over like a ghost out of the sea."

The skipper took one of the small lamps from the binnacle, and, holding it aloft, walked boldly up to the cause of alarm. In the little patch of light we saw a ghastly black-bearded man, dripping with water, regarding us with unwinking eyes, which glowed red in the light of the lamp.

Digitized by Google

"Where did you come from?" asked the skipper.

The figure shook its head.

"Where did you come from?" he repeated, walking up, and laying his hand on the other's shoulder.

Then the intruder spoke, but in a strange fashion and in strange words. We leaned forward to listen, but, even when he repeated them, we could make nothing of them.

"He's a furriner," said Roberts.

"Blest if I've ever 'eard the lingo afore," said Bill. "Does anybody rekernize it?"

Nobody did, and the skipper, after another attempt, gave it up, and, falling back upon the universal language of signs, pointed first to the man and then to the sea. The other understood him, and, in a heavy, slovenly fashion, portrayed a man drifting in an open boat, and clutching and clambering up the side of a passing ship. As his meaning dawned upon us, we rushed to the stern, and, leaning over, peered into the gloom, but the night was dark, and we saw nothing.

Digitized by Google

"Well," said the skipper, turning to Bill, with a mighty yawn, "take him below, and give him some grub, and the next time a gentleman calls on you, don't make such a confounded row about it."

He went below, followed by the mate, and after some slight hesitation, Roberts stepped up to the intruder, and signed to him to follow. He came stolidly enough, leaving a trail of water on the deck, and, after changing into the dry things we gave him, fell to, but without much appearance of hunger, upon some salt beef and biscuits, regarding us between bites with black, lack-lustre eyes.

"He seems as though he's a-walking in his sleep," said the cook.

"He ain't very hungry," said one of the men; "he seems to mumble his food."

"Hungry!" repeated Bill, who had just left the wheel. "Course he ain't famished. He had his tea last night."

The men stared at him in bewilderment.

"Don't you see?" said Bill, still in a hoarse whisper; "ain't you ever seen them eyes

Digitized by Google

afore? Don't you know what he used to say about dying? It's Jem Dadd come back to us. Jem Dadd got another man's body, as he always said he would."

"Rot!" said Roberts, trying to speak bravely, but he got up, and, with the others, huddled together at the end of the fo'c's'le, and stared in a bewildered fashion at the sodden face and short, squat figure of our visitor. For his part, having finished his meal, he pushed his plate from him, and, leaning back on the locker, looked at the empty bunks.

Roberts caught his eye, and, with a nod and a wave of his hand, indicated the bunks. The fellow rose from the locker, and, amid a breathless silence, climbed into one of them—Jem Dadd's!

He slept in the dead sailor's bed that night, the only man in the fo'c's'le who did sleep properly, and turned out heavily and lumpishly in the morning for breakfast.

The skipper had him on deck after the meal, but could make nothing of him. To all his questions he replied in the strange tongue of

Digitized by Google

the night before, and, though our fellows had been to many ports, and knew a word or two of several languages, none of them recognized it. The skipper gave it up at last, and, left to himself, he stared about him for some time, regardless of our interest in his movements, and then, leaning heavily against the side of the ship, stayed there so long that we thought he must have fallen asleep.

"He's half-dead *now*!" whispered Roberts.

"Hush!" said Bill, "mebbe he's been in the water a week or two, and can't quite make it out. See how he's looking at it now."

He stayed on deck all day in the sun, but, as night came on, returned to the warmth of the fo'c's'le. The food we gave him remained untouched, and he took little or no notice of us, though I fancied that he saw the fear we had of him. He slept again in the dead man's bunk, and when morning came still lay there.

Until dinner-time, nobody interfered with him, and then Roberts, pushed forward by the others, approached him with some food. He motioned it away with a dirty, bloated

Digitized by Google

hand, and, making signs for water, drank it eagerly.

For two days he stayed there quietly, the black eyes always open, the stubby fingers always on the move. On the third morning Bill, who had conquered his fear sufficiently to give him water occasionally, called softly to us.

"Come and look at him," said he. "What's the matter with him?"

"He's dying!" said the cook, with a shudder.

"He can't be going to die *yet*!" said Bill, blankly.

As he spoke the man's eyes seemed to get softer and more life-like, and he looked at us piteously and helplessly. From face to face he gazed in mute inquiry, and then, striking his chest feebly with his fist, uttered two words.

We looked at each other blankly, and he repeated them eagerly, and again touched his chest.

"It's his name," said the cook, and we all repeated them.

He smiled in an exhausted fashion, and then,

Digitized by Google

rallying his energies, held up a forefinger; as we stared at this new riddle, he lowered it, and held up all four fingers, doubled.

"Come away," quavered the cook; "he's putting a spell on us."

We drew back at that, and back farther still, as he repeated the motions. Then Bill's face cleared suddenly, and he stepped towards him.

"He means his wife and younkers!" he shouted eagerly. "This ain't no Jem Dadd!"

It was good then to see how our fellows drew round the dying sailor, and strove to cheer him. Bill, to show he understood the finger business, nodded cheerily, and held his hand at four different heights from the floor. The last was very low, so low that the man set his lips together, and strove to turn his heavy head from us.

"Poor devil!" said Bill, "he wants us to tell his wife and children what's become of him. He must ha' been dying when he come aboard. What was his name, again?"

Digitized by Google

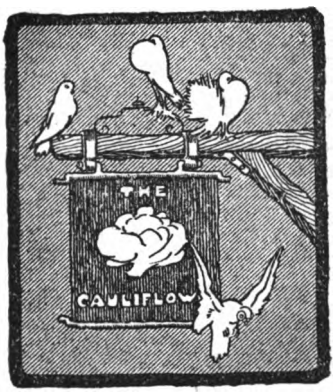
But the name was not easy to English lips, and we had already forgotten it.

" Ask him again," said the cook, " and write it down. Who's got a pen? "

He went to look for one as Bill turned to the sailor to get him to repeat it. Then he turned round again, and eyed us blankly, for, by this time, the owner had himself forgotten it.

Digitized by Google

FOUR PIGEONS



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Four Pigeons

THE old man took up his mug and shifted along the bench until he was in the shade of the elms that stood before the *Cauliflower*. The action also had the advantage of bringing him opposite the two strangers who were refreshing themselves after the toils of a long walk in the sun.

"My hearing ain't wot it used to be," he said, tremulously. "When you asked me to have a mug o' ale I 'ardly heard you; and if you was to ask me to 'ave another, I mightn't hear you at all."

One of the men nodded.

"Not over there," piped the old man. "That's why I come over here," he added, after a pause. "It 'ud be rude like to take no notice; if you was to ask me."

He looked round as the landlord approached,

Digitized by Google

and pushed his mug gently in his direction. The landlord, obeying a nod from the second stranger, filled it.

"It puts life into me," said the old man, raising it to his lips and bowing. "It makes me talk."

"Time we were moving, Jack," said the first traveller. The second, assenting to this as an abstract proposition, expressed, however, a determination to finish his pipe first.

I heard you saying something about shooting, continued the old man, and that reminds me of some shooting we 'ad here once in Claybury. We've always 'ad a lot o' game in these parts, and if it wasn't for a low, poaching fellow named Bob Pretty—Claybury's disgrace I call 'im—we'd 'ave a lot more.

It happened in this way. Squire Rockett was going abroad to foreign parts for a year, and he let the Hall to a gentleman from London named Sutton. A real gentleman 'e was, open-'anded and free, and just about October he 'ad a lot of 'is friends come down from London to 'elp 'im kill the pheasants.

Digitized by Google

The first day they frightened more than they killed, but they enjoyed theirselves ali right until one gentleman, who 'adn't shot a single thing all day, shot pore Bill Chambers wot was beating with about a dozen more.

Bill got most of it in the shoulder and a little in the cheek, but the row he see fit to make you'd ha' thought he'd been killed. He laid on the ground groaning with 'is eyes shut, and everybody thought 'e was dying till Henery Walker stooped down and asked 'im whether 'e was hurt.

It took four men to carry Bill 'ome, and he was that particular you wouldn't believe. They 'ad to talk in whispers, and when Peter Gubbins forgot 'imself and began to whistle he asked him where his 'art was. When they walked fast he said they jolted 'im, and when they walked slow 'e asked 'em whether they'd gone to sleep or wot.

Bill was in bed for nearly a week, but the gentleman was very nice about it and said that it was his fault. He was a very pleasant-spoken gentleman, and, arter sending Dr.

Digitized by Google

Green to him and saying he'd pay the bill, 'e gave Bill Chambers ten pounds to make up for 'is sufferings.

Bill 'ad intended to lay up for another week, and the doctor, wot 'ad been calling twice a day, said he wouldn't be responsible for 'is life if he didn't; but the ten pounds was too much for 'im, and one evening, just a week arter the accident, he turned up at this *Cauliflower* public-'ouse and began to spend 'is money.

His face was bandaged up, and when 'e come in he walked feeble-like and spoke in a faint sort o' voice. Smith, the landlord, got 'im a easy-chair and a couple of pillers out o' the parlour, and Bill sat there like a king, telling us all his sufferings and wot it felt like to be shot.

I always have said wot a good thing beer is, and it done Bill more good than doctor's medicine. When he came in he could 'ardly crawl, and at nine o'clock 'e was out of the easy-chair and dancing on the table as well as possible. He smashed three mugs and upset about two pints o' beer, but he just put his

Digitized by Google

'and in his pocket and paid for 'em without a word.

"There's plenty more where that came from," he ses, pulling out a handful o' money.

Peter Gubbins looked at it, 'ardly able to speak. "It's worth while being shot to 'ave all that money," he ses, at last.

"Don't you worry yourself, Peter," ses Bob Pretty; "there's plenty more of you as'll be shot afore them gentlemen at the Hall 'as finished. Bill's the fust, but 'e won't be the last—not by a long chalk."

"They're more careful now," ses Dicky Weed, the tailor.

"All right; 'ave it your own way," ses Bob, nasty-like. "I don't know much about shooting, being on'y a pore labourin' man. All I know is I shouldn't like to go beating for them. I'm too fond o' my wife and family."

"There won't be no more shot," ses Sam Jones.

"We're too careful," ses Peter Gubbins.

"Bob Pretty don't know everything," ses Dicky Weed.

Digitized by Google

" I'll bet you what you like there'll be some more of you shot," ses Bob Pretty, in a temper. " Now, then."

" 'Ow much'll you bet, Bob," ses Sam Jones, with a wink at the others.

" I can see you winking, Sam Jones," ses Bob Pretty, " but I'll do more than bet. The last bet I won is still owing to me. Now, look 'ere; I'll pay you sixpence a week all the time you're beating if you promise to give me arf of wot you get if you're shot. I can't say fairer than that."

" Will you give me sixpence a week, too? " ses Henery Walker, jumping up.

" I will," ses Bob; " and anybody else that likes. And wot's more, I'll pay in advance. Fust sixpences now."

Claybury men 'ave never been backward when there's been money to be made easy, and they all wanted to join Bob Pretty's club, as he called it. But fust of all 'e asked for a pen and ink, and then he got Smith, the landlord, being a scholard, to write out a paper for them to sign. Henery Walker was the fust to write 'is name, and then Sam Jones, Peter

Digitized by Google

Gubbins, Ralph Thomson, Jem Hall, and Walter Bell wrote theirs. Bob stopped 'em then, and said six 'ud be enough to go on with; and then 'e paid up the sixpences and wished 'em luck.

Wot they liked a'most as well as the sixpences was the idea o' getting the better o' Bob Pretty. As I said afore, he was a poacher, and that artful that up to that time nobody 'ad ever got the better of 'im.

They made so much fun of 'im the next night that Bob turned sulky and went off 'ome, and for two or three nights he 'ardly showed his face; and the next shoot they 'ad he went off to Wickham and nobody saw 'im all day.

That very day Henery Walker was shot. Several gentlemen fired at a rabbit that was started, and the next thing they knew Henery Walker was lying on the ground calling out that 'is leg 'ad been shot off.

He made more fuss than Bill Chambers a'most, 'specially when they dropped 'im off a hurdle carrying him 'ome, and the things he

Digitized by Google

said to Dr. Green for rubbing his 'ands as he came into the bedroom was disgraceful.

The fust Bob Pretty 'eard of it was up at the *Cauliflower* at eight o'clock that evening, and he set down 'is beer and set off to see Henery as fast as 'is legs could carry 'im. Henery was asleep when 'e got there, and, do all he could, Bob Pretty couldn't wake 'im till he sat down gentle on 'is bad leg.

"It's on'y me, old pal," he ses, smiling at 'im as Henery woke up and shouted at 'im to get up.

Henery Walker was going to say something bad, but 'e thought better of it, and he lay there arf busting with rage, and watching Bob out of the corner of one eye.

"I quite forgot you was on my club till Smith reminded me of it," ses Bob. "Don't you take a farthing less than ten pounds, Henery."

Henery Walker shut his eyes again. "I forgot to tell you I made up my mind this morning not to belong to your club any more, Bob," he ses.

"Why didn't you come and tell me, Henery,

Digitized by Google

instead of leaving it till it was too late?" ses Bob, shaking his 'ead at 'im.

"I shall want all that money," ses Henery in a weak voice. "I might 'ave to have a wooden leg, Bob."

"Don't meet troubles arf way, Henery," ses Bob, in a kind voice. "I've no doubt Mr. Sutton'll throw in a wooden leg if you want it, and look here, if he does, I won't trouble you for my arf of it."

He said good-night to Henery and went off, and when Mrs. Walker went up to see 'ow Henery was getting on he was carrying on that alarming that she couldn't do nothing with 'im.

He was laid up for over a week, though it's my opinion he wasn't much hurt, and the trouble was that nobody knew which gentleman 'ad shot 'im. Mr. Sutton talked it over with them, and at last, arter a good deal o' trouble, and Henery pulling up 'is trousers and showing them 'is leg till they was fair sick of the sight of it, they paid 'im ten pounds, the same as they 'ad Bill.

Digitized by Google

It took Bob Pretty two days to get his arf, but he kept very quiet about it, not wishing to make a fuss in the village for fear Mr. Sutton should get to hear of the club. At last he told Henery Walker that 'e was going to Wickham to see 'is lawyer about it, and arter Smith the landlord 'ad read the paper to Henery and explained 'ow he'd very likely 'ave to pay more than the whole ten pounds then, 'e gave Bob his arf and said he never wanted to see 'im again as long as he lived.

Bob stood treat up at the *Cauliflower* that night, and said 'ow bad he'd been treated. The tears stood in 'is eyes a'most, and at last 'e said that if 'e thought there was going to be any more fuss of that kind he'd wind up the club.

"It's the best thing you can do," ses Sam Jones; "I'm not going to belong to it any longer, so I give you notice. If so be as I get shot I want the money for myself."

"Me, too," ses Peter Gubbins; "it 'ud fair break my 'art to give Bob Pretty five pounds. I'd sooner give it to my wife."

Digitized by Google

All the other chaps said the same thing, but Bob pointed out to them that they 'ad taken their sixpences on'y the night afore, and they must stay in for the week. He said that was the law. Some of 'em talked about giving 'im 'is sixpences back, but Bob said if they did they must pay up all the sixpences they had 'ad for three weeks. The end of it was they said they'd stay in for that week and not a moment longer.

The next day Sam Jones and Peter Gubbins altered their minds. Sam found a couple o' shillings that his wife 'ad hidden in her Sunday bonnet, and Peter Gubbins opened 'is boy's money-box to see 'ow much there was in it. They came up to the *Cauliflower* to pay Bob their eighteenpences, but he wasn't there, and when they went to his 'ouse Mrs. Pretty said as 'ow he'd gone off to Wickham and wouldn't be back till Saturday. So they 'ad to spend the money on beer instead.

That was on Tuesday, and things went on all right till Friday, when Mr. Sutton 'ad another shoot. The birds was getting scarce and the gentlemen that anxious to shoot them

Digitized by Google

there was no 'olding them. Once or twice the keepers spoke to 'em about carefulness, and said wot large families they'd got, but it wasn't much good. They went on blazing away, and just at the corner of the wood Sam Jones and Peter Gubbins was both hit; Sam in the leg and Peter in the arm.

The noise that was made was awful—everybody shouting that they 'adn't done it, and all speaking at once, and Mr. Sutton was dancing about a'most beside 'imself with rage. Pore Sam and Peter was 'elped along by the others; Sam being carried and Peter led, and both of 'em with the idea of getting all they could out of it, making such 'orrible noises that Mr. Sutton couldn't hear 'imself calling his friends names.

"There seems to be wounded men calling out all over the place," he ses, in a temper.

"I think there *is* another one over there, sir," ses one o' the keepers, pointing.

Sam Jones and Peter Gubbins both left off to listen, and then they all heard it distinctly. A dreadful noise it was, and when Mr. Sutton

Digitized by Google

and one or two more follered it up they found poor Walter Bell lying on 'is face in a bramble.

"Wot's the matter?" ses Mr. Sutton, shouting at 'im.

"I've been shot from behind," ses Walter. "I'd got something in my boot, and I was just stooping down to fasten it up agin when I got it."

"But there oughtn't to be anybody 'ere," ses Mr. Sutton to one of the keepers.

"They get all over the place, sir," ses the keeper, scratching his 'ead. "I fancied I 'eard a gun go off here a minute or two arter the others was shot."

"I believe he's done it 'imself," says Mr. Sutton, stamping his foot.

"I don't see 'ow he could, sir," ses the keeper, touching his cap and looking at Walter as was still lying with 'is face on 'is arms.

They carried Walter 'ome that way on a hurdle, and Dr. Green spent all the rest o' that day picking shots out o' them three men and telling 'em to keep still. He 'ad to do Sam Jones by candle-light, with Mrs. Jones 'olding

Digitized by Google

the candle with one hand and crying with the other. Twice the doctor told her to keep it steady, and poor Sam 'ad only just passed the remark, "How 'ot it was for October," when they discovered that the bed was on fire. The doctor said that Sam was no trouble. He got off of the bed by 'imself, and, when it was all over and the fire put out, the doctor found him sitting on the stairs with the leg of a broken chair in 'is hand calling for 'is wife.

Of course, there was a terrible to-do about it in Claybury, and up at the Hall, too. All of the gentlemen said as 'ow they hadn't done it, and Mr. Sutton was arf crazy with rage. He said that they 'ad made 'im the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood, and that they oughtn't to shoot with anything but pop-guns. They got to such high words over it that two of the gentlemen went off 'ome that very night.

There was a lot of talk up at the *Cauliflower,* too, and more than one pointed out 'ow lucky Bob Pretty was in getting four men out of the six in his club. As I said afore, Bob was away at the time, but he came back the next night

Digitized by Google

and we 'ad the biggest row here you could wish for to see.

Henery Walker began it. "I s'pose you've 'eard the dreadful news, Bob Pretty?" he ses, looking at 'im.

"I 'ave," ses Bob; "and my 'art bled for 'em. I told you wot those gentlemen was like, didn't I? But none of you would believe me. Now you can see as I was right."

"It's very strange," ses Henery Walker, looking round; "it's very strange that all of us wot's been shot belonged to Bob Pretty's precious club."

"It's my luck, Henery," ses Bob. "I always was lucky from a child."

"And I s'pose you think you're going to 'ave arf of the money they get?" ses Henery Walker.

"Don't talk about money while them pore chaps is suffering," ses Bob. "I'm surprised at you, Henery."

"You won't 'ave a farthing of it," ses Henery Walker; "and wot's more, Bob Pretty, I'm going to 'ave my five pounds back."

Digitized by Google

"Don't you believe it, Henery," ses Bob, smiling at 'im.

"I'm going to 'ave my five pounds back," ses Henery, "*and you know why.* I know wot your club was for now, and we was all a pack o' silly fools not to see it afore."

"Speak for yourself, Henery," ses John Biggs, who thought Henery was looking at 'im.

"I've been putting two and two together," ses Henery, looking round, "and it's as plain as the nose on your face. Bob Pretty hid up in the wood and shot us all himself!"

For a moment you might 'ave heard a pin drop, and then there was such a noise nobody could hear theirselves speak. Everybody was shouting his 'ardest, and the on'y quiet one there was Bob Pretty 'imself.

"Poor Henery; he's gorn mad," he ses, shaking his 'ead.

"You're a murderer," ses Ralph Thomson, shaking 'is fist at him.

"Henery Walker's gorn mad," ses Bob agin. "Why, I ain't been near the place. There's a dozen men'll swear that I was at Wick-

Digitized by Google

ham each time these misfortunate accidents 'appened."

"Men like you, they'd swear anything for a pot o' beer," ses Henery. "But I'm not going to waste time talking to you, Bob Pretty. I'm going straight off to tell Mr. Sutton."

"I shouldn't do that if I was you, Henery," ses Bob.

"I dessay," ses Henery Walker; "but then you see I am."

"I thought you'd gorn mad, Henery," ses Bob, taking a drink o' beer that somebody 'ad left on the table by mistake, "and now I'm sure of it. Why, if you tell Mr. Sutton that it wasn't his friends that shot them pore fellers he won't pay them anything. 'Tain't likely 'e would, is it?"

Henery Walker, wot 'ad been standing up looking fierce at 'im, sat down agin, struck all of a heap.

"And he might want your ten pounds back, Henery," said Bob in a soft voice. "And seeing as 'ow you was kind enough to give five to me, and spent most of the other, it 'ud

Digitized by Google

come 'ard on you, wouldn't it? Always think afore you speak, Henery. I always do."

Henery Walker got up and tried to speak, but 'e couldn't, and he didn't get 'is breath back till Bob said it was plain to see that he 'adn't got a word to say for 'imself. Then he shook 'is fist at Bob and called 'im a low, thieving, poaching murderer.

"You're not yourself, Henery," ses Bob. "When you come round you'll be sorry for trying to take away the character of a pore labourin' man with a ailing wife and a large family. But if you take my advice you won't say anything more about your wicked ideas; if you do, these pore fellers won't get a farthing. And you'd better keep quiet about the club mates for their sakes. Other people might get the same crazy ideas in their silly 'eads as Henery. Keepers especially."

That was on'y common sense; but, as John Biggs said, it did seem 'ard to think as 'ow Bob Pretty should be allowed to get off scot-free, and with Henery Walker's five pounds too. "There's one thing," he ses to Bob;

Digitized by Google

" you won't 'ave any of these other pore chaps money; and, if they're men, they ought to make it up to Henery Walker for the money he 'as saved 'em by finding you out."

" They've got to pay me fust," ses Bob. " I'm a pore man, but I'll stick up for my rights. As for me shooting 'em, they'd ha' been 'urt a good deal more if I'd done it—especially Mr. Henery Walker. Why, they're hardly 'urt at all."

" Don't answer 'im, Henery," ses John Biggs. " You save your breath to go and tell Sam Jones and the others about it. It'll cheer 'em up."

" And tell 'em about my arf, in case they get too cheerful and go overdoing it," ses Bob Pretty, stopping at the door. " Good-night all."

Nobody answered 'im; and arter waiting a little bit Henery Walker set off to see Sam Jones and the others. John Biggs was quite right about its making 'em cheerful, but they see as plain as Bob 'imself that it 'ad got to be kept quiet. " Till we've spent the money, at

Digitized by Google

any rate," ses Walter Bell; "then p'r'aps Mr. Sutton might get Bob locked up for it."

Mr. Sutton went down to see 'em all a day or two afterwards. The shooting-party was broken up and gone 'ome, but they left some money behind 'em. Ten pounds each they was to 'ave, same as the others, but Mr. Sutton said that he 'ad heard 'ow the other money was wasted at the *Cauliflower,* and 'e was going to give it out to 'em ten shillings a week until the money was gorn. He 'ad to say it over and over agin afore they understood 'im, and Walter Bell 'ad to stuff the bedclo'es in 'is mouth to keep civil.

Peter Gubbins, with 'is arm tied up in a sling, was the fust one to turn up at the *Cauliflower,* and he was that down-'arted about it we couldn't do nothing with 'im. He 'ad expected to be able to pull out ten golden sovereigns, and the disapp'intment was too much for 'im.

"I wonder 'ow they heard about it," ses Dicky Weed.

"I can tell you," ses Bob Pretty, wot 'ad

Digitized by Google

been sitting up in a corner by himself, nodding and smiling at Peter, wot wouldn't look at 'im. "A friend o' mine at Wickham wrote to him about it. He was so disgusted at the way Bill Chambers and Henery Walker come up 'ere wasting their 'ard-earned money, that he sent 'im a letter, signed 'A Friend of the Working Man,' telling 'im about it and advising 'im what to do."

"A friend o' yours?" ses John Biggs, staring at 'im. "What for?"

"I don't know," ses Bob; "he's a wunnerful good scholard, and he likes writin' letters. He's going to write another to-morrer, unless I go over and stop 'im."

"Another?" ses Peter, who 'ad been tellin' everybody that 'e wouldn't speak to 'im agin as long as he lived. "Wot about?"

"About the idea that I shot you all," ses Bob. "I want my character cleared. O' course, they can't prove anything against me —I've got my witnesses. But, taking one thing with another, I see now that it does look suspicious, and I don't suppose any of

Digitized by Google

you'll get any more of your money. Mr. Sutton is so sick o' being laughed at, he'll jump at anything."

"You dursn't do it, Bob," ses Peter, all of a tremble.

"It ain't me, Peter, old pal," ses Bob, "it's my friend. But I don't mind stopping 'im for the sake of old times if I get my arf. He'd listen to me, I feel sure."

At fust Peter said he wouldn't get a farthing out of 'im if his friend wrote letters till Doomsday; but by-and-by he thought better of it, and asked Bob to stay there while he went down to see Sam and Walter about it. When 'e came back he'd got the fust week's money for Bob Pretty; but he said he left Walter Bell carrying on like a madman, and, as for Sam Jones, he was that upset 'e didn't believe he'd last out the night.

Digitized by Google

THE TEMPTATION OF SAMUEL BURGE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Temptation of Samuel Burge

MR. HIGGS, jeweller, sat in the small parlour behind his shop, gazing hungrily at a supper-table which had been laid some time before. It was a quarter to ten by the small town clock on the mantelpiece, and the jeweller rubbing his hands over the fire tried in vain to remember what etiquette had to say about starting a meal before the arrival of an expected guest.

"He must be coming by the last train after all, sir," said the housekeeper entering the room and glancing at the clock. "I suppose these London gentlemen keep such late hours they don't understand us country folk wanting to get to bed in decent time. You must be wanting your supper, sir."

Mr. Higgs sighed. "I shall be glad of my

Digitized by Google

supper," he said slowly, "but I dare say our friend is hungrier still. Travelling is hungry work."

"Perhaps he is thinking over his words for the seventh day," said the housekeeper solemnly. "Forgetting hunger and thirst and all our poor earthly feelings in the blessedness of his work."

"Perhaps so," assented the other, whose own earthly feelings were particularly strong just at that moment.

"Brother Simpson used to forget all about meal-times when he stayed here," said the housekeeper, clasping her hands. "He used to sit by the window with his eyes half-closed and shake his head at the smell from the kitchen and call it flesh-pots of Egypt. He said that if it wasn't for keeping up his strength for the work, luscious bread and fair water was all he wanted. I expect Brother Burge will be a similar sort of man."

"Brother Clark wrote and told me that he only lives for the work," said the jeweller, with

Digitized by Google

another glance at the clock. "The chapel at Clerkenwell is crowded to hear him. It's a blessed favour and privilege to have such a selected instrument staying in the house. I'm curious to see him; from what Brother Clark said I rather fancy that he was a little bit wild in his younger days."

"Hallelujah!" exclaimed the housekeeper with fervour. "I mean to think as he's seen the error of his ways," she added sharply, as her master looked up.

"There he is," said the latter, as the bell rang.

The housekeeper went to the side-door, and drawing back the bolt admitted the gentleman whose preaching had done so much for the small but select sect known as the Seventh Day Primitive Apostles. She came back into the room followed by a tall stout man, whose upper lip and short stubby beard streaked with grey seemed a poor match for the beady eyes which lurked behind a pair of clumsy spectacles.

Digitized by Google

"Brother Samuel Burge?" inquired the jeweller, rising.

The visitor nodded, and regarding him with a smile charged with fraternal love, took his hand in a huge grip and shook it fervently.

"I am glad to see you, Brother Higgs," he said, regarding him fondly. "Oh, 'ow my eyes have yearned to be set upon you! Oh, 'ow my ears 'ave longed to hearken unto the words of your voice!"

He breathed thickly, and taking a seat sat with his hands upon his knees, looking at a fine piece of cold beef which the housekeeper had just placed upon the table.

"Is Brother Clark well?" inquired the jeweller, placing a chair for him at the table and taking up his carving-knife.

"Dear Brother Clark is in excellent 'ealth, I thank you," said the other, taking the proffered chair. "Oh! what a man he is; what a instrument for good. Always stretching out them blessed hands of 'is to make one of the fallen a Seventh Day Primitive."

Digitized by Google

"And success attends his efforts?" said the jeweller.

"Success, Brother!" repeated Mr. Burge, eating rapidly and gesticulating with his knife. "Success ain't no name for it. Why, since this day last week he has saved three pick-pockets, two Salvationists, one bigamist and a Roman Catholic."

Brother Higgs murmured his admiration. "You are also a power for good," he said wistfully. "Brother Clark tells me in his letter that your exhortations have been abundantly blessed."

Mr. Burge shook his head. "A lot of it falls by the wayside," he said modestly, "but some of it is an eye-opener to them as don't entirely shut their ears. Only the day before yesterday I 'ad two jemmies and a dark lantern sent me with a letter saying as 'ow the owner had no further use for 'em."

The jeweller's eyes glistened with admiration not quite untinged with envy. "Have you expounded the Word for long?" he inquired.

"Six months," replied the other. "It

Digitized by Google

come to me quite natural—I was on the penitent bench on the Saturday, and the Wednesday afterwards I preached as good a sermon as ever I've preached in my life. Brother Clark said it took 'is breath away."

"And he's a judge too," said the admiring jeweller.

"Now," continued Brother Burge, helping himself plentifully to pickled walnuts. "Now there ain't standing room in our Bethel when I'm expounding. People come to hear me from all parts—old and young—rich and poor—and the Apostles that don't come early 'ave to stand outside and catch the crumbs I throw 'em through the winders."

"It is enough," sighed Brother Higgs, whose own audience was frequently content to be on the wrong side of the window, "it is enough to make a man vain."

"I struggle against it, Brother," said Mr. Burge, passing his cup up for some more tea. "I fight against it hard, but once the Evil One was almost too much for me; and in spite of

Digitized by Google

myself, and knowing besides that it was a plot of 'is, I nearly felt uplifted."

Brother Higgs, passing him some more beef, pressed for details.

"He sent me two policemen," replied the other, scowling darkly at the meanness of the trick. "One I might 'ave stood, but two come to being pretty near too much for me. They sat under me while I gave 'em the Word 'ot and strong, and the feeling I had standing up there and telling policemen what they ought to do I shall never forget."

"But why should policemen make you proud?" asked his puzzled listener.

Mr. Burge looked puzzled in his turn. "Why, hasn't Brother Clark told you about me?" he inquired.

Mr. Higgs shook his head. "He sort of—suggested that—that you had been a little bit wild before you came to us," he murmured apologetically.

"A — little — bit — wild?" repeated Brother Burge, in horrified accents. "ME? a little bit *wild*?"

Digitized by Google

"No doubt he exaggerated a little," said the jeweller hurriedly. "Being such a good man himself, no doubt things would seem wild to him that wouldn't to us—to me, I mean."

"A little bit wild," said his visitor again. "Sam Burge, the Converted Burglar, a little bit *wild*. Well, well!"

"Converted *what*?" shouted the jeweller, half-rising from his chair.

"Burglar," said the other shortly. "Why, I should think I know more about the inside o' gaols than anybody in England; I've pretty near killed three policemen, besides breaking a gent's leg and throwing a footman out of window, and then Brother Clark goes and says I've been a little bit wild. I wonder what he would 'ave?"

"But you—you've quite reformed now?" said the jeweller, resuming his seat and making a great effort to hide his consternation.

"I 'ope so," said Mr. Burge, with alarming humility; "but it's an uncertain world, and far be it from me to boast. That's why I've come here."

Digitized by Google

Mr. Higgs, only half-comprehending, sat back gasping.

"If I can stand this," pursued Brother Burge, gesticulating wildly in the direction of the shop, "if I can stand being here with all these 'ere pretty little things to be 'ad for the trouble of picking of 'em up, I can stand anything. Tempt me, I says to Brother Clark. Put me in the way o' temptation, I says. Let me see whether the Evil One or me is the strongest; let me 'ave a good old up and down with the Powers o' Darkness, and see who wins."

Mr. Higgs, gripping the edge of the table with both hands, gazed at this new Michael in speechless consternation.

"I think I see his face now," said Brother Burge, with tender enthusiasm. "All in a glow it was, and he patted me on the shoulder and says, 'I'll send you on a week's mission to Duncombe,' he says, and 'you shall stop with Brother Higgs who 'as a shop full o' cunning wrought vanities in silver and gold.'"

"But suppose," said the jeweller, finding

Digitized by Google

his voice by a great effort, "suppose victory is not given unto you."

"It won't make any difference," replied his visitor. "Brother Clark promised that it shouldn't. 'If you fall, Brother,' he says, 'we'll help you up again. When you are tired of sin come back to us—there's always a welcome.'"

"But——" began the dismayed jeweller.

"We can only do our best," said Brother Burge, "the rest we must leave. I 'ave girded my loins for the fray, and taken much spiritual sustenance on the way down from this little hymn-book."

Mr. Higgs paid no heed. He sat marvelling over the fatuousness of Brother Clark and trying to think of ways and means out of the dilemma into which that gentleman's perverted enthusiasm had placed him. He wondered whether it would be possible to induce Brother Burge to sleep elsewhere by offering to bear his hotel expenses, and at last, after some hesitation, broached the subject.

"What!" exclaimed the other, pushing

Digitized by Google

his plate from him and regarding him with great severity. "Go and sleep at a hotel? After Brother Clark has been and took all this trouble? Why, I wouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"Brother Clark has no right to expose you to such a trial," said Mr. Higgs with great warmth.

"I wonder what he'd say if he 'eard you," remarked Mr. Burge sternly. "After his going and making all these arrangements, for you to try and go and upset 'em. To ask me to shun the fight like a coward; to ask *me* to go and hide in the rear-ranks in a hotel with everything locked up, or a Coffer Pallis with nothing to steal."

"I should sleep far more comfortably if I knew that you were not undergoing this tremendous strain," said the unhappy Mr. Higgs, "and besides that, if you did give way, it would be a serious business for me—that's what I want you to look at. I am afraid that if—if unhappily you did fall, I couldn't prevent you."

Digitized by Google

"I'm sure you couldn't," said the other cordially. "That's the beauty of it; that's when the Evil One's whispers get louder and louder. Why, I could choke you between my finger and thumb. If unfortunately my fallen nature should be too strong for me, don't interfere whatever you do. I mightn't be myself."

Mr. Higgs rose and faced him gasping. "Not even—call for—the police—I suppose," he jerked out.

"That would be interfering," said Brother Burge coldly.

The jeweller tried to think. It was past eleven. The housekeeper had gone to spend the night with an ailing sister, and a furtive glance at Brother Burge's small shifty eyes and fat unwholesome face was sufficient to deter him from leaving him alone with his property, while he went to ask the police to give an eye to his house for the night. Besides, it was more than probable that Mr. Burge would decline to allow such a proceeding. With a growing sense of his peril he resolved to try flattery.

Digitized by Google

"It was a great thing for the Brethren to secure a man like you," he said.

"I never thought they'd ha' done it," said Mr. Burge frankly. "I've 'ad all sorts trying to convert me; crying over me and praying over me. I remember the first dear good man that called me a lorst lamb. He didn't say anything else for a month."

"So upset," hazarded the jeweller.

"I broke his jor, pore feller," said Brother Burge, a sad but withal indulgent smile lighting up his face at the vagaries of his former career. "What time do you go to bed, Brother?"

"Any time," said the other reluctantly. "I suppose you are tired with your journey?"

Mr. Burge assented, and rising from his chair yawned loudly and stretched himself. In the small room with his huge arms raised he looked colossal.

"I suppose," said the jeweller, still seeking to re-assure himself, "I suppose dear Brother Clark felt pretty certain of you, else he wouldn't have sent you here?"

"Brother Clark said 'What is a jeweller's

Digitized by Google

shop compared with a 'uman soul, a priceless 'uman soul?'" replied Mr. Burge. "What is a few gew-gaws to decorate them that perish, and make them vain, when you come to consider the opportunity of such a trial, and the good it'll do and the draw it'll be—if I do win—and testify to the congregation to that effect? Why, there's sermons for a lifetime in it."

"So there is," said the jeweller, trying to look cheerful. "You've got a good face, Brother Burge, and you'll do a lot of good by your preaching. There is honesty written in every feature."

Mr. Burge turned and surveyed himself in the small pier-glass. "Yes," he said, somewhat discontentedly, "I don't look enough like a burglar to suit some of 'em."

"Some people are hard to please," said the other warmly.

Mr. Burge started and eyed him thoughtfully, and then as Mr. Higgs after some hesitation walked into the shop to turn the gas out, stood in the doorway watching him. A

Digitized by Google

smothered sigh as he glanced round the shop bore witness to the state of his feelings.

The jeweller hesitated again in the parlour, and then handing Brother Burge his candle turned out the gas, and led the way slowly upstairs to the room which had been prepared for the honoured visitor. He shook hands at the door and bade him an effusive good-night, his voice trembling despite himself as he expressed a hope that Mr. Burge would sleep well. He added casually that he himself was a very light sleeper.

To-night sleep of any kind was impossible. He had given up the front room to his guest, and his own window looked out on an overgrown garden. He sat trying to read, with his ears alert for the slightest sound. Brother Burge seemed to be a long time undressing. For half an hour after he had retired he could hear him moving restlessly about his room.

Twelve o'clock struck from the tower of the parish church, and was followed almost directly by the tall clock standing in the hall downstairs. Scarcely had the sounds died away

Digitized by Google

than a low moaning from the next room caused the affrighted jeweller to start from his chair and place his ear against the wall. Two or three hollow groans came through the plaster, followed by ejaculations which showed clearly that Brother Burge was at that moment engaged in a terrified combat with the Powers of Darkness to decide whether he should, or should not, rifle his host's shop. His hands clenched and his ear pressed close to the wall, the jeweller listened to a monologue which increased in interest with every word.

"I tell you I won't," said the voice in the next room with a groan, "I *won't*. Get thee behind me—Get thee—No, and don't shove me over to the door; if you can't get behind me without doing that, stay where you are. Yes, I know it's a fortune as well as what you do; but it ain't *mine*."

The listener caught his breath painfully.

"Diamond rings," continued Brother Burge in a suffocating voice. "Stop it, I tell you. No, I won't just go and look at 'em."

A series of groans which the jeweller noticed

Digitized by Google

to his horror got weaker and weaker testified to the greatness of the temptation. He heard Brother Burge rise, and then a succession of panting snarls seemed to indicate a fierce bodily encounter.

"I don't—want to look at 'em," said Brother Burge in an exhausted voice. "What's —the good of—*looking* at 'em? It's like you, you know diamonds are my weakness. What does it matter if he is asleep? What's my knife got to do with you?"

Brother Higgs reeled back and a mist passed before his eyes. He came to himself at the sound of a door opening, and impelled with a vague idea of defending his property, snatched up his candle and looked out on to the landing.

The light fell on Brother Burge, fully dressed and holding his boots in his hand. For a moment they gazed at each other in silence; then the jeweller found his voice.

"I thought you were ill, Brother," he faltered.

An ugly scowl lit up the other's features. "Don't you tell me any of your lies," he said

Digitized by Google

fiercely. "You're watching me; that's what you're doing. Spying on me."

"I thought that you were being tempted," confessed the trembling Mr. Higgs.

An expression of satisfaction which he strove to suppress appeared on Mr. Burge's face.

"So I was," he said sternly. "So I was; but that's my business. I don't want your assistance; I can fight my own battles. You go to bed—I'm going to tell the congregation I won the fight single-'anded."

"So you have, Brother," said the other eagerly; "but it's doing me good to see it. It's a lesson to me; a lesson to all of us the way you wrestled."

"I thought you was asleep," growled Brother Burge, turning back to his room and speaking over his shoulder. "You get back to bed; the fight ain't half over yet. Get back to bed and keep quiet."

The door closed behind him, and Mr. Higgs, still trembling, regained his room and looked in agony at the clock. It was only half-past twelve and the sun did not rise until six. He

Digitized by Google

sat and shivered until a second instalment of groans in the next room brought him in desperation to his feet.

Brother Burge was in the toils again, and the jeweller despite his fears could not help realizing what a sensation the story of his temptation would create. Brother Burge was now going round and round his room like an animal in a cage, and sounds as of a soul wrought almost beyond endurance smote upon the listener's quivering ear. Then there was a long silence more alarming even than the noise of the conflict. Had Brother Burge won, and was he now sleeping the sleep of the righteous, or——Mr. Higgs shivered and put his other ear to the wall. Then he heard his guest move stealthily across the floor; the boards creaked and the handle of the door turned.

Mr. Higgs started, and with a sudden flash of courage born of anger and desperation seized a small brass poker from the fire-place, and taking the candle in his other hand went out on to the landing again. Brother Burge

Digitized by Google

was closing his door softly, and his face when he turned it upon the jeweller was terrible in its wrath. His small eyes snapped with fury, and his huge hands opened and shut convulsively.

"What, agin!" he said in a low growl. "After all I told you!"

Mr. Higgs backed slowly as he advanced.

"No noise," said Mr. Burge in a dreadful whisper. "One scream and I'll——*What were you going to do with that poker?*"

He took a stealthy step forward.

"I—I," began the jeweller. His voice failed him. "Burglars," he mouthed, "downstairs."

"*What?*" said the other, pausing.

Mr. Higgs threw truth to the winds. "I heard them in the shop," he said, recovering, "that's why I took up the poker. Can't you hear them?"

Mr. Burge listened for the fraction of a second. "Nonsense," he said huskily.

"I heard them talking," said the other recklessly. "Let's go down and call the police."

Digitized by Google

"Call 'em from the winder," said Brother Burge, backing with some haste, "they might 'ave pistols or something, and they're ugly customers when they're disturbed."

He stood with strained face listening.

"Here they come," whispered the jeweller with a sudden movement of alarm.

Brother Burge turned, and bolting into his room clapped the door to and locked it. The jeweller stood dumbfounded on the landing; then he heard the window go up and the voice of Brother Burge, much strengthened by the religious exercises of the past six months, bellowing lustily for the police.

For a few seconds Mr. Higgs stood listening and wondering what explanation he should give. Still thinking, he ran downstairs, and, throwing open the pantry window, unlocked the door leading into the shop and scattered a few of his cherished possessions about the floor. By the time he had done this, people were already beating upon the street-door and exchanging hurried remarks with Mr. Burge at the window above. The jeweller shot back

Digitized by Google

the bolts, and half-a-dozen neighbours, headed by the butcher opposite, clad in his nightgown and armed with a cleaver, burst into the passage. A constable came running up just as the pallid face of Brother Burge peered over the balusters. The constable went upstairs three at a time, and twisting his hand in the ex-burglar's neck-cloth bore him backwards.

"I've got one," he shouted. "Come up and hold him while I look round."

The butcher was beside him in a moment; Brother Burge struggling wildly, called loudly upon the name of Brother Higgs.

"That's all right, constable," said the latter, "that's a friend of mine."

"Friend o' yours, sir?" said the disappointed officer, still holding him.

The jeweller nodded. "Mr. Samuel Burge the Converted Burglar," he said mechanically.

"Conver——" gasped the astonished constable. "Converted burglar? Here!"

"He is a preacher now," added Mr. Higgs.

"Preacher?" retorted the constable. "Why it's as plain as a pikestaff. Confederates:

Digitized by Google

his part was to go down and let 'em in."

Mr. Burge raised a piteous outcry. "I hope you may be forgiven for them words," he cried piously.

"What time did you go up to bed?" pursued the constable.

"About half-past eleven," replied Mr. Higgs.

The other grunted with satisfaction. "And he's fully dressed, with his boots off," he remarked. "Did you hear him go out of his room at all?"

"He did go out," said the jeweller truthfully, "but——"

"I thought so," said the constable, turning to his prisoner with affectionate solicitude. "Now you come along o' me. Come quietly, because it'll be the best for you in the end."

"You won't get your skull split open then," added the butcher, toying with his cleaver.

The jeweller hesitated. He had no desire to be left alone with Mr. Burge again; and a sense of humour, which many years' association with the Primitive Apostles had not quite eradicated, strove for hearing.

Digitized by Google

"Think of the sermon it'll make," he said encouragingly to the frantic Mr. Burge, "think of the congregation!"

Brother Burge replied in language which he had not used in public since he had joined the Apostles. The butcher and another man stood guard over him while the constable searched the premises and made all secure again. Then with a final appeal to Mr. Higgs who was keeping in the background, he was pitched to the police-station by the energetic constable and five zealous assistants.

A diffidence, natural in the circumstances, prevented him from narrating the story of his temptation to the magistrates next morning, and Mr. Higgs was equally reticent. He was put back while the police communicated with London, and in the meantime Brother Clark and a band of Apostles flanked down to his support.

On his second appearance before the magistrates he was confronted with his past; and his past to the great astonishment of the Brethren being free from all blemish with the

Digitized by Google

solitary exception of fourteen days for stealing milk-cans, he was discharged with a caution. The disillusioned Primitive Apostles also gave him his freedom.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE MADNESS OF MR. LISTER

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The Madness of Mr. Lister

OLD JEM LISTER, of the *Susannah,* was possessed of two devils—the love of strong drink and avarice—and the only thing the twain had in common was to get a drink without paying for it. When Mr. Lister paid for a drink, the demon of avarice masquerading as conscience preached a teetotal lecture, and when he showed signs of profiting by it, the demon of drink would send him hanging round public-house doors cadging for drinks in a way which his shipmates regarded as a slur upon the entire ship's company. Many a healthy thirst reared on salt beef and tickled with strong tobacco had been spoiled by the sight of Mr. Lister standing by the entrance, with a propitiatory smile, waiting to be invited in to share it, and on one occasion they had even seen him

Digitized by Google

(him, Jem Lister, A.B.) holding a horse's head, with ulterior motives.

It was pointed out to Mr. Lister at last that his conduct was reflecting discredit upon men who were fully able to look after themselves in that direction, without having any additional burden thrust upon them. Bill Henshaw was the spokesman, and on the score of violence (miscalled firmness) his remarks left little to be desired. On the score of profanity, Bill might recall with pride that in the opinion of his fellows he had left nothing unsaid.

"You ought to ha' been a member o' Parliament, Bill," said Harry Lea, when he had finished.

"It wants money," said Henshaw, shaking his head.

Mr. Lister laughed, a senile laugh, but not lacking in venom.

"That's what we've got to say," said Henshaw, turning upon him suddenly. "If there's anything I hate in this world, it's a drinking miser. You know our opinion, and the best thing you can do is to turn over a new leaf now."

Digitized by Google

"Take us all in to the *Goat and Compasses*," urged Lea; "bring out some o' those sovrins you've been hoarding."

Mr. Lister gazed at him with frigid scorn, and finding that the conversation still seemed to centre round his unworthy person, went up on deck and sat glowering over the insults which had been heaped upon him. His futile wrath when Bill dogged his footsteps ashore next day and revealed his character to a bibulous individual whom he had almost persuaded to be a Christian—from his point of view—bordered upon the maudlin, and he wandered back to the ship, wild-eyed and dry of throat.

For the next two months it was safe to say that every drink he had he paid for. His eyes got brighter and his complexion clearer, nor was he as pleased as one of the other sex might have been when the self-satisfied Henshaw pointed out these improvements to his companions, and claimed entire responsibility for them. It is probable that Mr. Lister, under these circumstances, might in time have lived

Digitized by Google

down his taste for strong drink, but that at just that time they shipped a new cook.

He was a big, cadaverous young fellow, who looked too closely after his own interests to be much of a favourite with the other men forward. On the score of thrift, it was soon discovered that he and Mr. Lister had much in common, and the latter, pleased to find a congenial spirit, was disposed to make the most of him, and spent, despite the heat, much of his spare time in the galley.

"You keep to it," said the greybeard impressively; "money was made to be took care of; if you don't spend your money you've always got it. I've always been a saving man—what's the result?"

The cook, waiting some time in patience to be told, gently inquired what it was.

"'Ere am I," said Mr. Lister, good-naturedly helping him to cut a cabbage, "at the age of sixty-two with a bank-book down below in my chest, with one hundered an' ninety pounds odd in it."

"One 'undered and ninety pounds!" repeated the cook, with awe.

Digitized by Google

"To say nothing of other things," continued Mr. Lister, with joyful appreciation of the effect he was producing. "Altogether I've got a little over four 'undered pounds."

The cook gasped, and with gentle firmness took the cabbage from him as being unfit work for a man of such wealth.

"It's very nice," he said, slowly. "It's very nice. You'll be able to live on it in your old age."

Mr. Lister shook his head mournfully, and his eyes became humid.

"There's no old age for me," he said, sadly; "but you needn't tell them," and he jerked his thumb towards the forecastle.

"No, no," said the cook.

"I've never been one to talk over my affairs," said Mr. Lister, in a low voice. "I've never yet took fancy enough to anybody so to do. No, my lad, I'm saving up for somebody else."

"What are you going to live on when you're past work then?" demanded the other.

Mr. Lister took him gently by the sleeve,

Digitized by Google

and his voice sank with the solemnity of his subject: "I'm not going to have no old age," he said, resignedly.

"Not going to live!" repeated the cook, gazing uneasily at a knife by his side. "How do you know?"

"I went to a orsepittle in London," said Mr. Lister. "I've been to two or three altogether, while the money I've spent on doctors is more than I like to think of, and they're all surprised to think that I've lived so long. I'm so chock-full o' complaints, that they tell me I can't live more than two years, and I might go off at any moment."

"Well, you've got money," said the cook, "why don't you knock off work now and spend the evenin' of your life ashore? Why should you save up for your relatives?"

"I've got no relatives," said Mr. Lister; "I'm all alone. I 'spose I shall leave my money to some nice young feller, and I hope it'll do 'im good."

With the dazzling thoughts which flashed through the cook's brain the cabbage dropped

Digitized by Google

violently into the saucepan, and a shower of cooling drops fell on both men.

"I 'spose you take medicine?" he said, at length.

"A little rum," said Mr. Lister, faintly; "the doctors tell me that it is the only thing that keeps me up—o' course, the chaps down there"—he indicated the forecastle again with a jerk of his head—"accuse me o' taking too much."

"What do ye take any notice of 'em for?" inquired the other, indignantly.

"I 'spose it is foolish," admitted Mr. Lister; "but I don't like being misunderstood. I keep my troubles to myself as a rule, cook. I don't know what's made me talk to you like this. I 'eard the other day you was keeping company with a young woman."

"Well, I won't say as I ain't," replied the other, busying himself over the fire.

"An' the best thing, too, my lad," said the old man, warmly. "It keeps you stiddy, keeps you out of public-'ouses; not as they ain't good in moderation—I 'ope you'll be 'appy."

Digitized by Google

The cook thanked him, and noticed that Mr. Lister was fidgeting with a piece of paper.

"A little something I wrote the other day," said the old man, catching his eye. "If I let you see it, will you promise not to tell a soul about it, and not to give me no thanks?"

The wondering cook promised, and, the old man being somewhat emphatic on the subject, backed his promise with a home made affidavit of singular power and profanity.

"Here it is, then," said Mr. Lister.

The cook took the paper, and as he read the letters danced before him. He blinked his eyes and started again, slowly. In plain black and white and nondescript-coloured finger-marks, Mr. Lister, after a general statement as to his bodily and mental health, left the whole of his estate to the cook. The will was properly dated and witnessed, and the cook's voice shook with excitement and emotion as he offered to hand it back.

"I don't know what I've done for you to do this," he said.

Mr. Lister waved it away again. "Keep

Digitized by Google

it," he said, simply; "while you've got it on you, you'll know it's safe."

From this moment a friendship sprang up between the two men which puzzled the remainder of the crew not a little. The attitude of the cook was as that of a son to a father: the benignancy of Mr. Lister beautiful to behold. It was noticed, too, that he had abandoned the reprehensible practice of hanging round tavern doors in favour of going inside and drinking the cook's health.

For about six months the cook, although always in somewhat straitened circumstances, was well content with the tacit bargain, and then, bit by bit, the character of Mr. Lister was revealed to him. It was not a nice character, but subtle; and when he made the startling discovery that a will could be rendered invalid by the simple process of making another one the next day, he became as a man possessed. When he ascertained that Mr. Lister when at home had free quarters at the house of a married niece, he used to sit about alone, and try and think of ways and means of securing

Digitized by Google

capital sunk in a concern which seemed to show no signs of being wound-up.

"I've got a touch of the 'art again, lad," said the elderly invalid, as they sat alone in the forecastle one night at Seacole.

"You move about too much," said the cook. "Why not turn in and rest?"

Mr. Lister, who had not expected this, fidgeted. "I think I'll go ashore a bit and try the air," he said, suggestively. "I'll just go as far as the *Black Horse* and back. You won't have me long now, my lad."

"No, I know," said the cook; "that's what's worrying me a bit."

"Don't worry about me," said the old man, pausing with his hand on the other's shoulder; "I'm not worth it. Don't look so glum, lad."

"I've got something on my mind, Jem," said the cook, staring straight in front of him.

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Lister.

"You know what you told me about those pains in your inside?" said the cook, without looking at him.

Jem groaned and felt his side.

Digitized by Google

"And what you said about its being a relief to die," continued the other, "only you was afraid to commit suicide?"

"Well?" said Mr. Lister.

"It used to worry me," continued the cook, earnestly. "I used to say to myself, 'Poor old Jem,' I ses, 'why should 'e suffer like this when he wants to die? It seemed 'ard.'"

"It is 'ard," said Mr. Lister, "but what about it?"

The other made no reply, but looking at him for the first time, surveyed him with a troubled expression.

"What about it?" repeated Mr. Lister, with some emphasis.

"You did say you wanted to die, didn't you?" said the cook. "Now suppose—— suppose——"

"Suppose what?" inquired the old man, sharply. "Why don't you say what you're agoing to say?"

"Suppose," said the cook, "some one what liked you, Jem—what liked you, mind—'eard you say this over and over again, an' see you

Digitized by Google

sufferin' and 'eard you groanin' and not able to do nothin' for you except lend you a few shillings here and there for medicine, or stand you a few glasses o' rum; suppose they knew a chap in a chemist's shop?"

"Suppose they did?" said the other, turning pale.

"A chap what knows all about p'isons," continued the cook, "p'isons what a man can take without knowing it in 'is grub. Would it be wrong, do you think, if that friend I was speaking about put it in your food to put you out of your misery?"

"*Wrong,*" said Mr. Lister, with glassy eyes. "*Wrong.* Look 'ere, cook——"

"I don't mean anything to give him pain," said the other, waving his hand; "you ain't felt no pain lately, 'ave you, Jem?"

"Do you mean to say——" shouted Mr. Lister.

"I don't mean to say anything," said the cook. "Answer my question. You ain't felt no pain lately, 'ave you?"

"Have—you—been—putting—p'ison—in

Digitized by Google

—my—wittles?" demanded Mr. Lister, in trembling accents.

"If I 'ad, Jem, supposin' that I 'ad," said the cook, in accents of reproachful surprise, "do you mean to say that you'd mind?"

"MIND," said Mr. Lister, with fervour. "I'd 'ave you 'ung!"

"But you said you wanted to die," said the surprised cook.

Mr. Lister swore at him with startling vigour. "I'll 'ave you 'ung," he repeated, wildly.

"Me," said the cook, artlessly. "What for?"

"For giving me p'ison," said Mr. Lister, frantically. "Do you think you can deceive me by your roundabouts? Do you think I can't see through you?"

The other with a sphinx-like smile sat unmoved. "Prove it," he said, darkly. "But supposin' if anybody *'ad* been givin' you p'ison, would you like to take something to prevent its acting?"

"I'd take gallons of it," said Mr. Lister, feverishly.

Digitized by Google

The other sat pondering, while the old man watched him anxiously. "It's a pity you don't know your own mind, Jem," he said, at length; "still, you know your own business best. But it's very expensive stuff."

"How much?" inquired the other.

"Well, they won't sell more than two shillingsworth at a time," said the cook, trying to speak carelessly, "but if you like to let me 'ave the money, I'll go ashore to the chemist's and get the first lot now."

Mr. Lister's face was a study in emotions, which the other tried in vain to decipher.

Then he slowly extracted the amount from his trousers-pocket, and handed it over without a word.

"I'll go at once," said the cook, with a little feeling, "and I'll never take a man at his word again, Jem."

He ran blithely up on deck, and stepping ashore, spat on the coins for luck and dropped them in his pocket. Down below, Mr. Lister, with his chin in his hand, sat in a state of mind pretty evenly divided between rage and fear.

Digitized by Google

The cook, who was in no mood for company, missed the rest of the crew by two public-houses, and having purchased a baby's teething powder and removed the label, had a congratulatory drink or two before going on board again. A chatter of voices from the forecastle warned him that the crew had returned, but the tongues ceased abruptly as he descended, and three pairs of eyes surveyed him in grim silence.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"Wot 'ave you been doin' to poor old Jem?" demanded Henshaw, sternly.

"Nothin'," said the other, shortly.

"You ain't been p'isoning 'im?" demanded Henshaw.

"Certainly not," said the cook, emphatically.

"He ses you told 'im you p'isoned 'im," said Henshaw, solemnly, "and 'e give you two shillings to get something to cure 'im. It's too late now."

"What?" stammered the bewildered cook.

He looked round anxiously at the men.

Digitized by Google

They were all very grave, and the silence became oppressive.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

Henshaw and the others exchanged glances.

"He's gone mad," said he, slowly.

"Mad?" repeated the horrified cook, and, seeing the aversion of the crew, in a broken voice he narrated the way in which he had been victimized.

"Well, you've done it now," said Henshaw, when he had finished. "He's gone right orf 'is 'ed."

"Where is he?" inquired the cook.

"Where you can't follow him," said the other, slowly.

"Heaven?" hazarded the unfortunate cook.

"No; skipper's bunk," said Lea.

"Oh, can't I foller 'im?" said the cook, starting up. "I'll soon 'ave 'im out o' that."

"Better leave 'im alone," said Henshaw. "He was that wild we couldn't do nothing with 'im, singing an' larfin' and crying all together—I certainly thought he was p'isoned."

Digitized by Google

"I'll swear I ain't touched him," said the cook.

"Well, you've upset his reason," said Henshaw; "there'll be an awful row when the skipper comes aboard and finds 'im in 'is bed."

"Well, come an' 'elp me to get 'im out," said the cook.

"I ain't going to be mixed up in it," said Henshaw, shaking his head.

"Don't you, Bill," said the other two.

"Wot the skipper'll say I don't know," said Henshaw; "anyway, it'll be said to you, not us."

"I'll go and get 'im out if 'e was five madmen," said the cook, compressing his lips.

"You'll harve to carry 'im out, then," said Henshaw. "I don't wish you no 'arm, cook, and perhaps it would be as well to get 'im out afore the skipper or mate comes aboard. If it was me, I know what I should do."

"What?" inquired the cook, breathlessly.

Digitized by Google

"Draw a sack over his head," said Henshaw, impressively; "he'll scream like blazes as soon as you touch him, and rouse the folks ashore if you don't. Besides that, if you draw it well down it'll keep his arms fast."

The cook thanked him fervently, and routing out a sack, rushed hastily on deck, his departure being the signal for Mr. Henshaw and his friends to make preparations for retiring for the night so hastily as almost to savour of panic.

The cook, after a hasty glance ashore, went softly below with the sack over his arm and felt his way in the darkness to the skipper's bunk. The sound of deep and regular breathing reassured him, and without undue haste he opened the mouth of the sack and gently raised the sleeper's head.

"Eh? Wha——" began a sleepy voice.

The next moment the cook had bagged him, and gripping him tightly round the middle, turned a deaf ear to the smothered cries of his victim as he strove to lift him out of the bunk. In the exciting time which followed, he had

Digitized by Google

more than one reason for thinking that he had caught a centipede.

"Now, you keep still," he cried, breathlessly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He got his burden out of bed at last, and staggered to the foot of the companion-ladder with it. Then there was a halt, two legs sticking obstinately across the narrow way and refusing to be moved, while a furious humming proceeded from the other end of the sack.

Four times did the exhausted cook get his shoulder under his burden and try and push it up the ladder, and four times did it wriggle and fight its way down again. Half crazy with fear and rage, he essayed it for the fifth time, and had got it half-way up when there was a sudden exclamation of surprise from above, and the voice of the mate sharply demanding an explanation.

"What the blazes are you up to?" he cried.

"It's all right, sir," said the panting cook; "old Jem's had a drop too much and got down aft, and I'm getting 'im for'ard again."

Digitized by Google

"Jem?" said the astonished mate. "Why, he's sitting up here on the fore-hatch. He came aboard with me."

"Sitting," began the horrified cook; "sit —oh, lor!"

He stood with his writhing burden wedged between his body and the ladder, and looked up despairingly at the mate.

"I'm afraid I've made a mistake," he said in a trembling voice.

The mate struck a match and looked down.

"Take that sack off," he demanded, sternly.

The cook placed his burden upon its feet, and running up the ladder stood by the mate shivering. The latter struck another match, and the twain watched in breathless silence the writhings of the strange creature below as the covering worked slowly upwards. In the fourth match it got free, and revealed the empurpled visage of the master of the *Susannah*. For the fraction of a second the cook gazed at him in speechless horror, and then, with a hopeless cry, sprang ashore and ran for it, hotly pursued by his enraged victim. At the time

Digitized by Google

of sailing he was still absent, and the skipper, loth to part two such friends, sent Mr. James Lister, at the urgent request of the anxious crew, to look for him.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE WHITE CAT

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The White Cat

THE traveller stood looking from the tap-room window of the *Cauliflower* at the falling rain. The village street below was empty, and everything was quiet with the exception of the garrulous old man smoking with much enjoyment on the settle behind him.

"It'll do a power o' good," said the ancient, craning his neck round the edge of the settle and turning a bleared eye on the window. "I ain't like some folk; I never did mind a drop o' rain."

The traveller grunted and, returning to the settle opposite the old man, fell to lazily stroking a cat which had strolled in attracted by the warmth of the small fire which smouldered in the grate.

"He's a good mouser," said the old man,

Digitized by Google

"but I expect that Smith the landlord would sell 'im to anybody for arf a crown; but we 'ad a cat in Claybury once that you couldn't ha' bought for a hundred golden sovereigns."

The traveller continued to caress the cat.

"A white cat, with one yaller eye and one blue one," continued the old man. "It sounds queer, but it's as true as I sit 'ere wishing that I 'ad another mug o' ale as good as the last you gave me."

The traveller, with a start that upset the cat's nerves, finished his own mug, and then ordered both to be refilled. He stirred the fire into a blaze, and, lighting his pipe and putting one foot on to the hob, prepared to listen.

It used to belong to old man Clark, young Joe Clark's uncle, said the ancient, smacking his lips delicately over the ale and extending a tremulous claw to the tobacco-pouch pushed towards him; and he was never tired of showing it off to people. He used to call it 'is blue-eyed darling, and the fuss 'e made o' that cat was sinful.

Young Joe Clark couldn't bear it, but being

Digitized by Google

down in 'is uncle's will for five cottages and a bit o' land bringing in about forty pounds a year, he 'ad to 'ide his feelings and pretend as he lowed it. He used to take it little drops o' cream and tit-bits o' meat, and old Clark was so pleased that 'e promised 'im that he should 'ave the cat along with all the other property when 'e was dead.

Young Joe said he couldn't thank 'im enough, and the old man, who 'ad been ailing a long time, made 'im come up every day to teach 'im 'ow to take care of it arter he was gone. He taught Joe 'ow to cook its meat and then chop it up fine; 'ow it liked a clean saucer every time for its milk; and 'ow he wasn't to make a noise when it was asleep.

"Take care your children don't worry it, Joe," he ses one day, very sharp. "One o' your boys was pulling its tail this morning, and I want you to clump his 'ead for 'im."

"Which one was it?" ses Joe.

"The slobbery-nosed one," ses old Clark.

"I'll give 'im a clout as soon as I get 'ome," ses Joe, who was very fond of 'is children.

Digitized by Google

"Go and fetch 'im and do it 'ere," ses the old man; "that'll teach 'im to love animals."

Joe went off 'ome to fetch the boy, and arter his mother 'ad washed his face, and wiped his nose, an' put a clean pinneyfore on 'im, he took 'im to 'is uncle's and clouted his 'ead for 'im. Arter that Joe and 'is wife 'ad words all night long, and next morning old Clark, coming in from the garden, was just in time to see 'im kick the cat right acrost the kitchen.

He could 'ardly speak for a minute, and when 'e could Joe see plain wot a fool he'd been. Fust of all 'e called Joe every name he could think of—which took 'im a long time—and then he ordered 'im out of 'is house.

"You shall 'ave my money wen your betters have done with it," he ses, "and not afore. That's all you've done for yourself."

Joe Clark didn't know wot he meant at the time, but when old Clark died three months arterwards 'e found out. His uncle 'ad made a new will and left everything to old George Barstow for as long as the cat lived, providing

Digitized by Google

that he took care of it. When the cat was dead the property was to go to Joe.

The cat was only two years old at the time, and George Barstow, who was arf crazy with joy, said it shouldn't be 'is fault if it didn't live another twenty years.

The funny thing was the quiet way Joe Clark took it. He didn't seem to be at all cut up about it, and when Henery Walker said it was a shame, 'e said he didn't mind, and that George Barstow was a old man, and he was quite welcome to 'ave the property as long as the cat lived.

"It must come to me by the time I'm an old man," he ses, "and that's all I care about."

Henery Walker went off, and as 'e passed the cottage where old Clark used to live, and which George Barstow 'ad moved into, 'e spoke to the old man over the palings and told 'im wot Joe Clark 'ad said. George Barstow only grunted and went on stooping and prying over 'is front garden.

"Bin and lost something?" ses Henery Walker, watching 'im.

Digitized by Google

"No; I'm finding," ses George Barstow, very fierce, and picking up something. "That's the fifth bit o' powdered liver I've found in my garden this morning."

Henery Walker went off whistling, and the opinion he'd 'ad o' Joe Clark began to improve. He spoke to Joe about it that arternoon, and Joe said that if 'e ever accused 'im o' such a thing again he'd knock 'is 'ead off. He said that he 'oped the cat 'ud live to be a hundred, and that 'e'd no more think of giving it poisoned meat than Henery Walker would of paying for 'is drink so long as 'e could get anybody else to do it for 'im.

They 'ad bets up at this 'ere *Cauliflower* public-'ouse that evening as to 'ow long that cat 'ud live. Nobody gave it more than a month, and Bill Chambers sat and thought o' so many ways o' killing it on the sly that it was wunnerful to hear 'im.

George Barstow took fright when he 'eard of them, and the care 'e took o' that cat was wunnerful to behold. Arf its time it was shut up in the back bedroom, and the other arf

Digitized by Google

George Barstow was fussing arter it till that cat got to hate 'im like pison. Instead o' giving up work as he'd thought to do, 'e told Henery Walker that 'e'd never worked so 'ard in his life.

"Wot about fresh air and exercise for it?" ses Henery.

"Wot about Joe Clark?" ses George Barstow. "I'm tied 'and and foot. I dursent leave the house for a moment. I ain't been to the *Cauliflower* since I've 'ad it, and three times I got out o' bed last night to see if it was safe."

"Mark my words," ses Henery Walker; "if that cat don't 'ave exercise, you'll lose it."

"I shall lose it if it does 'ave exercise," ses George Barstow, "that I know."

He sat down thinking arter Henery Walker 'ad gone, and then he 'ad a little collar and chain made for it, and took it out for a walk. Pretty nearly every dog in Claybury went with 'em, and the cat was in such a state o' mind afore they got 'ome he couldn't do anything with it. It 'ad a fit as soon as they got indoors,

Digitized by Google

and George Barstow, who 'ad read about children's fits in the almanac, gave it a warm bath. It brought it round immediate, and then it began to tear round the room and up and downstairs till George Barstow was afraid to go near it.

It was so bad that evening, sneezing, that George Barstow sent for Bill Chambers, who'd got a good name for doctoring animals, and asked 'im to give it something. Bill said he'd got some powders at 'ome that would cure it at once, and he went and fetched 'em and mixed one up with a bit o' butter.

"That's the way to give a cat medicine," he ses; "smear it with the butter and then it'll lick it off, powder and all."

He was just going to rub it on the cat when George Barstow caught 'old of 'is arm and stopped 'im.

"How do I know it ain't pison?" he ses. "You're a friend o' Joe Clark's, and for all I know he may ha' paid you to pison it."

"I wouldn't do such a thing," ses Bill. "You ought to know me better than that."

Digitized by Google

"All right," ses George Barstow; "you eat it then, and I'll give you two shillings in stead o' one. You can easy mix some more."

"Not me," ses Bill Chambers, making a face.

"Well, three shillings, then," ses George Barstow, getting more and more suspicious like; "four shillings—five shillings."

Bill Chambers shook his 'ead, and George Barstow, more and more certain that he 'ad caught 'im trying to kill 'is cat and that 'e wouldn't eat the stuff, rose 'im up to ten shillings.

Bill looked at the butter and then 'e looked at the ten shillings on the table, and at last he shut 'is eyes and gulped it down and put the money in 'is pocket.

"You see, I 'ave to be careful, Bill," ses George Barstow, rather upset.

Bill Chambers didn't answer 'im. He sat there as white as a sheet, and making such extraordinary faces that George was arf afraid of 'im.

Digitized by Google

"Anything wrong, Bill?" he ses at last.

Bill sat staring at 'im, and then all of a sudden he clapped 'is 'andkerchief to 'is mouth and, getting up from his chair, opened the door and rushed out. George Barstow thought at fust that he 'ad eaten pison for the sake o' the ten shillings, but when 'e remembered that Bill Chambers 'ad got the most delikit stummick in Claybury he altered 'is mind.

The cat was better next morning, but George Barstow had 'ad such a fright about it 'e wouldn't let it go out of 'is sight, and Joe Clark began to think that 'e would 'ave to wait longer for that property than 'e had thought, arter all. To 'ear 'im talk anybody'd ha' thought that 'e loved that cat. We didn't pay much attention to it up at the *Cauliflower* 'ere, except maybe to wink at 'im—a thing he couldn't a bear—but at 'ome, o' course, his young 'uns thought as everything he said was Gospel; and one day, coming 'ome from work,

Digitized by Google

as he was passing George Barstow's he was paid out for his deceitfulness.

"I've wronged you, Joe Clark," ses George Barstow, coming to the door, "and I'm sorry for it."

"Oh!" ses Joe, staring.

"Give that to your little Jimmy," ses George Barstow, giving 'im a shilling. "I've give 'im one, but I thought arterwards it wasn't enough."

"What for?" ses Joe, staring at 'im agin.

"For bringing my cat 'ome," ses George Barstow. "'Ow it got out I can't think, but I lost it for three hours, and I'd about given it up when your little Jimmy brought it to me in 'is arms. He's a fine little chap and 'e does you credit."

Joe Clark tried to speak, but he couldn't get a word out, and Henery Walker, wot 'ad just come up and 'eard wot passed, took hold of 'is arm and helped 'im home. He walked like a man in a dream, but arf-way he stopped and cut a stick from the hedge to take 'ome to little Jimmy. He said the boy 'ad been asking him

Digitized by Google

for a stick for some time, but up till then 'e'd always forgotten it.

At the end o' the fust year that cat was still alive, to everybody's surprise; but George Barstow took such care of it 'e never let it out of 'is sight. Every time 'e went out he took it with 'im in a hamper, and, to prevent its being pisoned, he paid Isaac Sawyer, who 'ad the biggest family in Claybury, sixpence a week to let one of 'is boys taste its milk before it had it.

The second year it was ill twice, but the horse-doctor that George Barstow got for it said that it was as 'ard as nails, and with care it might live to be twenty. He said that it wanted more fresh air and exercise; but when he 'eard 'ow George Barstow come by it he said that p'r'aps it would live longer indoors arter all.

At last one day, when George Barstow 'ad been living on the fat o' the land for nearly three years, that cat got out agin. George 'ad raised the front-room winder two or three inches to throw something outside, and, afore

Digitized by Google

he knew wot was 'appening, the cat was outside and going up the road about twenty miles an hour.

George Barstow went arter it, but he might as well ha' tried to catch the wind. The cat was arf wild with joy at getting out agin, and he couldn't get within arf a mile of it.

He stayed out all day without food or drink, follering it about until it came on dark, and then, o' course, he lost sight of it, and, hoping against 'ope that it would come home for its food, he went 'ome and waited for it. He sat up all night dozing in a chair in the front room with the door left open, but it was all no use; and arter thinking for a long time wot was best to do, he went out and told some o' the folks it was lost and offered a reward of five pounds for it.

You never saw such a hunt then in all your life. Nearly every man, woman, and child in Claybury left their work or school and went to try and earn that five pounds. By the afternoon George Barstow made it ten pounds provided the cat was brought 'ome safe and

Digitized by Google

sound, and people as was too old to walk stood at their cottage doors to snap it up as it came by.

Joe Clark was hunting for it 'igh and low, and so was 'is wife and the boys. In fact, I b'lieve that everybody in Claybury excepting the parson and Bob Pretty was trying to get that ten pounds.

O' course, we could understand the parson —'is pride wouldn't let 'im; but a low, poaching, thieving rascal like Bob Pretty turning up 'is nose at ten pounds was more than we could make out. Even on the second day, when George Barstow made it ten pounds down and a shilling a week for a year besides, he didn't offer to stir; all he did was to try and make fun o' them as *was* looking for it.

"Have you looked everywhere you can think of for it, Bill?" he ses to Bill Chambers.

"Yes, I 'ave," ses Bill.

"Well, then, you want to look everywhere else," ses Bob Pretty. "I know where I should look if I wanted to find it."

"Why don't you find it, then?" ses Bill.

Digitized by Google

"'Cos I don't want to make mischief," ses Bob Pretty. "I don't want to be unneighbourly to Joe Clark by interfering at all."

"Not for all that money?" ses Bill.

"Not for fifty pounds," ses Bob Pretty; "you ought to know me better than that, Bill Chambers."

"It's my belief that you know more about where that cat is than you ought to," ses Joe Gubbins.

"You go on looking for it, Joe," ses Bob Pretty, grinning; "it's good exercise for you, and you've only lost two days' work."

"I'll give you arf a crown if you let me search your 'ouse, Bob," ses Bill Chambers, looking at 'im very 'ard.

"I couldn't do it at the price, Bill," ses Bob Pretty, shaking his 'ead. "I'm a pore man, but I'm very partikler who I 'ave come into my 'ouse."

O' course, everybody left off looking at once when they heard about Bob—not that they believed that he'd be such a fool as to keep the cat in his 'ouse; and that evening, as soon as

Digitized by Google

it was dark, Joe Clark went round to see 'im.

"Don't tell me as that cat's found, Joe," ses Bob Pretty, as Joe opened the door.

"Not as I've 'eard of," said Joe, stepping inside. "I wanted to speak to you about it; the sooner it's found the better I shall be pleased."

"It does you credit, Joe Clark," ses Bob Pretty.

"It's my belief that it's dead," ses Joe, looking at 'im very 'ard; "but I want to make sure afore taking over the property."

Bob Pretty looked at 'im and then he gave a little cough. "Oh, you want it to be found dead," he ses. "Now, I wonder whether that cat's worth most dead or alive?"

Joe Clark coughed then. "Dead, I should think," he ses at last.

"George Barstow's just 'ad bills printed offering fifteen pounds for it," ses Bob Pretty.

"I'll give that or more when I come into the property," ses Joe Clark.

Digitized by Google

"There's nothing like ready-money, though, is there?" ses Bob.

"I'll promise it to you in writing, Bob," ses Joe, trembling.

"There's some things that don't look well in writing, Joe," says Bob Pretty, considering; "besides, why should you promise it to *me*?"

"O' course, I meant if you found it," ses Joe.

"Well, I'll do my best, Joe," ses Bob Pretty; "and none of us can do no more than that, can they?"

They sat talking and argufying over it for over an hour, and twice Bob Pretty got up and said 'e was going to see whether George Barstow wouldn't offer more. By the time they parted they was as thick as thieves, and next morning Bob Pretty was wearing Joe Clark's watch and chain, and Mrs. Pretty was up at Joe's 'ouse to see whether there was any of 'is furniture as she 'ad a fancy for.

She didn't seem to be able to make up 'er mind at fust between a chest o' drawers that 'ad belonged to Joe's mother and a grand-

Digitized by Google

father clock. She walked from one to the other for about ten minutes, and then Bob, who 'ad come in to 'elp her, told 'er to 'ave both.

"You're quite welcome," he ses; "ain't she, Joe?"

Joe Clark said "Yes," and arter he 'ad helped them carry 'em 'ome the Prettys went back and took the best bedstead to pieces, cos Bob said as it was easier to carry that way. Mrs. Clark 'ad to go and sit down at the bottom o' the garden with the neck of 'er dress undone to give herself air, but when she saw the little Prettys each walking 'ome with one of 'er best chairs on their 'eads she got and walked up and down like a mad thing.

"I'm sure I don't know where we are to put it all," ses Bob Pretty to Joe Gubbins, wot was looking on with other folks, "but Joe Clark is that generous he won't 'ear of our leaving anything."

"Has 'e gorn mad?" ses Bill Chambers, staring at 'im.

"Not as I knows on," ses Bob Pretty. "It's 'is good-'artedness, that's all. He feels sure

Digitized by Google

that that cat's dead, and that he'll 'ave George Barstow's cottage and furniture. I told 'im he'd better wait till he'd made sure, but 'e wouldn't."

Before they'd finished the Prettys 'ad picked that 'ouse as clean as a bone, and Joe Clark 'ad to go and get clean straw for his wife and children to sleep on; not that Mrs. Clark 'ad any sleep that night, nor Joe neither.

Henery Walker was the fust to see what it really meant, and he went rushing off as fast as 'e could run to tell George Barstow. George couldn't believe 'im at fust, but when 'e did he swore that if a 'air of that cat's head was harmed 'e'd 'ave the law o' Bob Pretty, and arter Henery Walker 'ad gone 'e walked round to tell 'im so.

"You're not yourself, George Barstow, else you wouldn't try and take away my character like that," ses Bob Pretty.

"Wot did Joe Clark give you all them things for?" ses George, pointing to the furniture.

"Took a fancy to me, I s'pose," ses Bob. "People do sometimes. There's something

Digitized by Google

do. Bob Pretty turning up 'is nose at fifteen pounds like that made 'im think that Joe Clark 'ad promised to pay 'im more if the cat was dead; and at last, arter worrying about it for a couple o' hours, 'e came up to this 'ere *Cauliflower* and offered Bob the fifteen pounds.

"Wot's this for?" ses Bob.

"For finding my cat," ses George.

"Look here," ses Bob, handing it back, "I've 'ad enough o' your insults; I don't know where your cat is."

"I mean for trying to find it, Bob," ses George Barstow.

"Oh, well, I don't mind that," ses Bob, taking it. "I'm a 'ard-working man, and I've got to be paid for my time; it's on'y fair to my wife and children. I'll start now."

He finished up 'is beer, and while the other chaps was telling George Barstow wot a fool he was Joe Clark slipped out arter Bob Pretty and began to call 'im all the names he could think of.

"Don't you worry," ses Bob; "the cat ain't found yet."

Digitized by Google

"Is it dead?" ses Joe Clark, 'ardly able to speak.

"'Ow should I know?" ses Bob; "that's wot I've got to try and find out. That's wot you gave me your furniture for, and wot George Barstow gave me the fifteen pounds for, ain't it? Now, don't you stop me now, 'cos I'm goin' to begin looking."

He started looking there and then, and for the next two or three days George Barstow and Joe Clark see 'im walking up and down with his 'ands in 'is pockets looking over garden fences and calling "Puss." He asked everybody 'e see whether they 'ad seen a white cat with one blue eye and one yaller one, and every time 'e came into the *Cauliflower* he put his 'ead over the bar and called "Puss," 'cos, as 'e said, it was as likely to be there as anywhere else.

It was about a week after the cat 'ad disappeared that George Barstow was standing at 'is door talking to Joe Clark, who was saying the cat must be dead and 'e wanted 'is property, when he sees a man coming up the road carry-

Digitized by Google

ing a basket stop and speak to Bill Chambers. Just as 'e got near them an awful "miaow" come from the basket and George Barstow and Joe Clark started as if they'd been shot.

"He's found it?" shouts Bill Chambers, pointing to the man.

"It's been living with me over at Ling for a week pretty nearly," ses the man. "I tried to drive it away several times, not knowing that there was fifteen pounds offered for it."

George Barstow tried to take 'old of the basket.

"I want that fifteen pounds fust," ses the man.

"That's on'y right and fair, George," ses Bob Pretty, who 'ad just come up. "You've got all the luck, mate. We've been hunting 'igh and low for that cat for a week."

Then George Barstow tried to explain to the man and call Bob Pretty names at the same time; but it was all no good. The man said it 'ad nothing to do with 'im wot he 'ad paid to Bob Pretty; and at last they fetched Policeman White over from Cudford, and

Digitized by Google

George Barstow signed a paper to pay five shillings a week till the reward was paid.

George Barstow 'ad the cat for five years arter that, but he never let it get away agin. They got to like each other in time and died within a fortnight of each other, so that Joe Clark got 'is property arter all.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
3 9015 00509 1270

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google